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12-1-1967

### "Knowledge Puffs Up," but Love Builds Up

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#### Recommended Citation

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## KNOW THYSELF

# “‘Knowledge’ Puffs Up, but Love Builds Up”

**N**OW concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ ‘Knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him” (1 Cor. 8:1, R.S.V.).\*

The problem of food offered to idols does not confront us today. However, there are many areas of our life where this principle may be directly or more generally applied. The one area to which I would like to direct your attention is the area of the minister-layman relationship as it pertains to Biblical and theological knowledge; that is, to the minister’s relationship to the laymen in his communication of the knowledge he has obtained at the Seminary.

What will be your attitude when you leave? If you have knowledge only, it will lead to pride, for knowledge alone puffs up. Like the proud Pharisee, we will gather our intellectual robes about us and pray, “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, ignorant, uneducated, without knowledge of Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann, or even like this colporteur. I read my Greek Bible twice a week, I subscribe to two learned journals (the AUSS and the JBL).” And the layman, impressed with your great learning, will pray afar off from you, “God be merciful to me an ignorant sinner,” but he will leave the place of prayer more blessed than the proud seminarian.

God deliver us from the attitude of the African native who had received a few grades of education. When Albert Schweitzer, who had several doctorates, including an M.D., was building his hospital with his own hands, he approached this man for a little manual assistance. Inflated with

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his intellectual achievement, he replied curtly to the great Schweitzer, “I don’t do that kind of work. I am an intellectual.” I hope that while we do not succumb to becoming carpenters and custodians only, we do not feel that manual work is beneath our dignity when the circumstances demand it. And there will be many such circumstances.

Paul says, “If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . , but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2).

### *Knowledge and Service*

Knowledge without love leads to pride of intellect, but knowledge with love leads to humility and a sense of obligation. Paul was willing to accommodate himself to the level of his hearers in order that he might win them to the gospel. He went down to their level that he might bring them up to his level.

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:20-23).

His attitude was not pride of possession but of obligation and service. He said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish" (Rom. 1:14).

### *Knowledge and Liberty*

The second thing that will happen to us if we have knowledge only will be a lack of consideration for others. Paul has to warn those who have knowledge only:

"Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling-block to the weak. For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died" (1 Cor. 8:9-11).

The Corinthians who had knowledge only thought of themselves and the exercising of their own liberty. They gave no thought to what consequences their actions might lead to. They didn't see any harm in what they were doing, and they didn't see any reason for altering their behavior for anyone, including their weak brother, even though it might mean spiritual disaster for him.

As seminarians we need to take care that we do not show lack of consideration for those who may not know as much as we do. Our goal, our aim in our ministry as far as our people are concerned, is to lead them to know God and to grow more intimately acquainted with Him and prepare to live with Him forever. Nothing must be done to weaken this relationship, but everything should be done to strengthen it.

### *Consider Weaker Members*

The presentation of a new idea or the correcting of an error must never be done without this awareness of, this consideration for, weaker members in the church. It is our business not to be the official corrector of the brethren, but to be shepherds who lead them to God. There are some things that we take for granted which may be quite shocking to some of our laymen who have not had the background and education we have had. How careful we must be that their experience with God is not shaken by our unwise statements! We must always begin where the people are if we expect to help them. If we start expound-

ing from the Seminary level with our talk about Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, synoptic criticism, text criticism, homoiouisia, et cetera, then we are asking for trouble. Remember your own background and preparation before you were ready. Even when the people have wrong facts and conceptions, we must exercise extreme care first to lay a solid foundation to carry them through the change. Unless a good spirit is placed in the heart of a man, the unclean spirit which has been cast out will return with seven other spirits, and the last state of that man will become worse than the first. As a builder does not repair a bad basement wall without first placing supports to hold up the building, so we must not repair without placing supports.

### *Do Not Destroy Concrete Images*

We must be careful also not to try to compel people to think the same way we do. Do not destroy all the concrete images of men lest with the images you also destroy the theological understanding that comes through them. Some people need the concrete as a vehicle of understanding. Some can come to theological understanding in a more abstract manner. The significant thing is not whether one thinks abstractly or concretely, but whether the theological understanding is Biblical and sound.

As it was said of Jesus, so must it be said of us, "He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick" (Matt. 12:20). The woman taken in adultery was a bruised reed and Zacchaeus was a smoldering wick, but Jesus treated them tenderly. So must be our relationship to the most uneducated of our members.

Knowledge without love becomes a stumbling block to the weak. Therefore, Paul's principle must be ours, "If food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall" (1 Cor. 8:13). Nothing I do must lead my brother to fall, to lead to a weakening of his faith.

### *Knowledge and Exploitation*

The third characteristic of knowledge without love is that it leads to exploitation. We use our knowledge in such a case for our own self-advancement and advantage. The person who combines knowledge with love as Paul did will not seek his own advantage but that of many, that they may be saved. He will not use knowledge as a

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## The Ministry in an Era of Expertise

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gram evaluation." The church's two universities would provide the formal instruction.

The church might also consider bringing together a representative group of administrators for a workshop out of which would come a manual on the functions and procedures of boards of trustees. Such a manual should define board powers and responsibilities and their limits, the role of the chairman, and the proper conduct of the members. Much study has been given to these subjects and much has been written, but the literature needs to be distilled and adapted to church situations. Such a manual, given authority by inclusion in the denominational policy book, made required reading for every newly elected board member, and supported by the board chairmen, should improve the order of business of the governing bodies, which are so important in the decision-making function of the church.

These suggestions may have an unpleasant sound to some who would remind the writer that the ministry is a calling and not a profession. Granted, without any reservation, that the ministry as such is a sacred calling to preach the gospel and to shepherd the flock. But when the minister is elected or appointed to an administrative office in the church he has an additional responsibility. In our day this has become a highly developed profession, to which the minister brings the insights of his calling to combine with the skills of administration. Who is to say that professional training for administration will in any way obstruct or offend the Holy Spirit?

### *Technology No Substitute for Greatness*

Technology is no substitute for greatness in men, nor solace for the lack of it. But expertise has its uses, in that it permits men on whom God has laid the mantle of responsibility to get more quickly and surely to the things that count most, and then through the performance of them.

Never before in history has the church been so richly endowed: a faithful laity with an ever-rising level of education and know-how, and a large proportion of professionals, many of them eminent men and women; an increasing number of col-

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lege-educated and seminary-trained clergy; both clergy and laity capable of appreciating, adapting, and utilizing the rich resources of our era in the service of the church and for the glory of God.

### “‘Knowledge’ Puffs Up, but Love Builds Up”

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means of self-advancement but as a means of service. His goal, his aim in the use of his knowledge, will be the saving of others.

The great man is the one who with an immense store of knowledge can translate it in a simple way for the sake of the most common people, that they may be edified. Love controls his knowledge for service rather than exploitation for self-advancement. Jesus did not speak in polysyllabic words or in complicated theological language or in abstruse philosophical terminology so that the people would be impressed with His learning and recognize that He had been to a seminary. No, His concern was not the impression He made but for the people to receive help. Not exploitation, but edification.

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, *not seeking my own advantage*, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:31-11:1).

“‘Knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up.”

Knowledge alone leads to pride, to lack of consideration, to exploitation. As we leave the Seminary and go into the field, let us, with all knowledge, make certain that we have love, for “if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, . . . but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

\* The texts quoted in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.