

A Love of Learning

Proverbs 12:1 | July 23, 2017 | Bryce Beale

“In the beginning,” writes the apostle John, “was the Word....And,” he adds, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace”—but not of grace only—“full of grace and *truth*.”¹

Really, one of the greatest graces given to us through the Savior, one of the gifts we hold nearest to our hearts, is truth.

Why else would we call Jesus the word? Or, as the Greek could also mean by it, the message?

Here is a picture presented to us in Scripture: The Father speaks, and from his mouth comes the breath or Spirit, that carries along an audible sound—a word, a message to mankind, which is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.² Mary conceives by the Spirit, and the message from the Father is born.

So we are not ashamed to affirm that, not religious notions alone, fit only for faith and practice, but the facts of this life are found here, in Jesus Christ.

On Christ the solid rock we take our stand, and before us loom the strongholds, the arguments and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God. No doubt you have felt their pressure; arrows tipped with flaming pitch fly down from the crenellated parapet of the stone castle that we call this world.

What student has not felt himself surrounded by the siege works of the enemy? You can withstand their battery for a season, but soon the gates grow weak, don't they? They moan, they are ready to burst open before the doctrines of higher education presently in vogue.

The mother who wants to raise her son or daughter in the teachings of Christ, and according to his instruction, makes herself the target of a demonic legion. The world could not tolerate the message of God, but hung Christ on the cross to rid themselves of his voice. If you would perpetuate his message in your conduct, you will not be tolerated either.

¹ John 1:1, 14 (ESV; emphasis mine).

² John Frame calls this the linguistic model of the Trinity (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013], 438).

But what of it? We are not pessimists, we keep our towel in hand and refuse to throw it in. We don't have a white flag to raise. We scan with a naked eye the spiritual hordes that amass themselves on the field before us; we feel the borders of our religious liberty moved closer and closer together, and we are no more than Gideon's three hundred, like sheep for the slaughter.

But what of it? We have Christ! We have been entrusted with the oracles of God. Culture may not be on our side; Christ is. God has spoken, and we have heard. The voices of men mean little to us now.

And when the furious tides of culture have driven away one generation with all of its ideas, and another laps into its place, we will say:

All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.³

Our Jesus, this word from God, is the same yesterday, today, and forever.⁴

You can see then why believers embrace the title given them as "people of the book." Truth is no small matter for us, for truth is in Jesus. Our Scriptures, which find their very center in Christ, are like bread to us. Without them we die. We need the truth; it sets us free. And in the desert of confusion which we travel, it alone can be our guide.

The same notion is suggested in our Proverb today, found in Proverbs 12:1.

PROVERBS 12:1

If any people love to learn, it ought to be us, the people of the book, the brothers and sisters of the incarnate word. Truth is our preoccupation—and by truth I do not mean some system of belief, as one among many. By truth I mean that which is, that which accords with reality.

In the pit of our stomachs is a perpetual hunger for knowledge of the truth.

If this describes you, then you will be interested in the proverb I have just read, and in my exposition of it, for it gives us two requirements for

³ Isaiah 40:6b-8.

⁴ Hebrews 13:8.

learning truth. If you do not set yourself to learn truth in this way then, even as a believer, your progress in knowledge will be slow and jolting. It needn't be. Heed the counsel of Solomon, delivered by the Spirit of God, for our instruction.

The eager learn

Here is the first requirement. Fulfill this, and your mind will be open to take in the knowledge God imparts. Truth is searching for a heart like this, and will make her home there when she finds it. Christ will reveal himself more fully to you if this attitude is in you!

And it is this: if you would learn truth, you must be *eager* to learn it.

See the first line of our passage: "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge."

We do not read, "Whoever likes discipline," nor "Whoever has an interest in discipline." The word is *love* and no attitude toward truth beneath love will work.

"I am the way," said Christ, "and the *truth*, and the life."⁵ You may like your dog, or like your car, or like a Facebook status. But when we come to the truth, as it is found in Christ Jesus, when we come before the word of God on a Sunday morning to hear it unfurled, when we sit before the Lord in the morning hours of our quiet time, when the scroll is unwound and the voice of God projects, then we must put all *liking* aside.

Will your wife accept a mere like? After she has divulged her heart to you and looks at you with misty eyes, will this work:

*click

"What is that?"

"That's a like. I liked your comment."

If "like" is the highest price you are willing to put on the gracious revelation of the Almighty God, if your Bible sits on your shelf like a fad or hobby, one book among the many, if your desire to understand it is not strong enough even to lift its light cover, then it may be as Spurgeon once quipped, that there is enough dust on the cover of your Bible to write "condemned" upon it with your finger. "A fool," a later Proverb reads, "takes no pleasure in understanding."⁶

⁵ John 14:6 (emphasis mine).

⁶ Proverbs 18:2.

One preacher speaks of those who come to him and say, “I have a new relationship with Jesus!” And he replies, “Do you have a new relationship with the Bible? Because if you don’t have a new relationship with the Bible, then you don’t have a new relationship with Jesus.”⁷

Here someone objects, “But I’ve tried to read the Bible—it’s too hard. I don’t understand it. Some of the words are too big, and some of its sayings are hard.”

That is no objection. We take that as a given—Scripture itself confirms the opinion, when Peter writes of Paul’s letters, “There are some things in them hard to understand.”⁸

See again our text, in the first line: “Whoever loves *discipline* loves knowledge.”⁹

Friends, we find here that if we want to reach knowledge, we will have to climb up the cliff of discipline. The one who loves knowledge loves discipline—why? Because discipline is the door that opens to knowledge. It is the way we travel and, at the end, find truth.

This discipline, or we might say, instruction, refers to the process that ends in knowledge.

In other words, if we want to know, we must learn. We must be told we are wrong and then told what is right instead. Our ears must exert themselves to hear, our minds employ themselves in diligent contemplation. There is no other way.

But if you love knowledge, this difficulty means little. If you love truth, you will chase it, no matter the obstacles.

I remember one man who recounted to me the story of how he proposed to his wife. He planned to surprise her as she sat at a dock, by swimming alongside her and holding up a rose. He started at a distance so that she would not notice him, but quickly discovered that he was swimming against the current. Exhausted midway and afraid he might drown, he reached for a supporting column that projected from the water, and caught his breath. However, the pillar was covered in razor-like barnacles which cut his chest. After a brief respite he continued to swim, finally making it to the dock. When he emerged, he was exhausted and bleeding from his wounds.

⁷ Paul Washer.

⁸ 2 Peter 3:16.

⁹ Emphasis mine.

But there was the rose, and there his beloved, and if he had to do it again to win her I'm sure he would. Because he loved her!

Jacob labored fourteen hard years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days because of the love he had for her.

So let the world detest our book, as they detest our Christ. Let the Bart Ehrman's of the world spit upon it, and we will every time pick up the hated volume and wipe away the spittle with our hand. Like the Chinese girl commanded by soldiers to spit upon the Bible, as the Christians in line before her were forced to do, we reach down and clean the word of God even at cost of our lives. It is the apple of our eye, dearer to our soul than any other material object. We love this book.

The new heart implanted in the Christian's chest beats with an eagerness for the truth, a craving for the Scriptures. And if we can only know the truth by discipline, by instruction, by study, by a continual reformation of our thoughts, a renewal of our minds through sweaty effort, by the consultation of commentaries and helps, by discussion in small groups and with friends, by the careful hearing of sermons, by unwavering meditation on the exact statements of Scripture, then happily we will labor our fourteen years for this Rachel.

And let me add, that Christ will not leave long waiting the one who sets his mind to pursue the truth. If you love our Lord with an incorruptible love, but feel yourself beneath this task of studying his word, feel yourself not bright enough, too new in the faith to study the Bible on your own, let me encourage you with this fact: you never study the Bible alone. Christ is always with you by his Spirit.

Are you eager to know what God would say to you in Scripture? Then you will know. Do not think your study of this book will be identical to your study of textbooks; your grasp of those depends entirely upon your brain, while your grasp of this book depends more upon the Spirit of God opening the eyes of your heart.

The maxim of our Savior here applies with full force: He who seeks, finds. If you love truth, you will have it.

The first attitude requisite for a knowledge of the truth is this: eagerness. You must love the truth.

The humble learn

But there is a second prerequisite, without which the first will not succeed.

You must not only be eager to know the truth, but you must be *humble* enough to know it.

See the second line of our text: "But he who hates reproof is stupid."

Why would anyone hate reproof? Even in that word "discipline" from the first line, this idea of reproof or correction is suggested. Why would someone reject correction, why would they refuse to be corrected in some false belief that they hold, and so believe what is true?

Our text says that the one who does so is stupid, animal-like. But what motivates him to be that way? I think the answer is obvious: pride.

Why in the days of Jesus were prostitutes permitted into the kingdom of heaven, but religious leaders who devoted their lives to an exact keeping of the law refused entrance? Because the prostitutes were humble enough to admit their immorality wrong, but the Pharisees were too proud to confess their hypocrisy.

When truth confronted the prostitute, she fell to her knees and wept. When truth confronted the Pharisee, he turned up his nose and scoffed.

Brothers and sisters, do not hate to be corrected! We will all accept in theory that our understanding of the facts of life is imperfect, but it is when a particular falsehood is challenged that we find our souls tested. There is placed before us the truth, on the one hand, extended by Christ through Scripture or through a friend or through a book or through a sermon or, hardest of all, through an opponent. And on the other hand is pride, already conceiving a hundred ways for you to evade the rebuke, to turn it around on the other person, to excuse yourself for this reason or for that.

If you choose pride, you will preserve your honor perhaps, but you have sold the truth for it. There are many who have played so loosely with the truth for the sake of their pride that they live in a self-constructed fairy tale that everyone can see through but themselves.

But it is not to be this way with you, my brothers and sisters. Humble yourselves under the mighty word of God, and he will lift you up at the proper time.

Confess your faulty notions, and you will not be in bad company: Moses took the correction of his father-in-law Jethro; King David crumbled before the pointed finger of Nathan; Peter, that rock of the church, was refuted to his face by Paul.

Your attitude must align with that of the Ethiopian eunuch, whom Philip found as he was reading a hard passage of Scripture. Here is a royal official with oversight of the Queen's treasury, riding in his chariot. And alongside him comes a stranger to ask if he understands the Scripture that he is reading.

We might expect a look of disdain to fall from that chariot; who is this nameless traveler to question the knowledge of so great a man? The eunuch has known more of this world, we might imagine, than Philip ever shall.

Pride could so easily interject itself, the eunuch reject Philip's question, and ride home with his pride preserved, and his soul lost.

But the Spirit had humbled this great man. He is not stupid—he does not hate reproof. He loves knowledge, and so he loves the instruction that leads him to that knowledge.

We might all learn volumes from his single line of reply. When Philip asked whether he understood what he was reading, the eunuch's answer came down from his royal chariot: "How can I, unless someone guides me?"¹⁰

I tell you, that eunuch knew the truth that day, and it delivered his soul from the wrath of God forever. He was no Naaman despising to dip himself in the Jordan at the word of God; he happily stopped his chariot and asked that Philip baptize him at once. He was humble, so he received the word of God, and it saved him.

I know that now some of you are on the cusp of salvation. The word of God, the gospel, that can turn your destiny from eternal torment under the wrath of God for your sin, to an eternal Eden of paradise and its never-ending joys, is laying in front of you as I present it. You know that Jesus is the way to the Father, that nothing but faith in his atoning work on the cross can justify you before the court of heaven. You understand that a full surrender to the Lord is required of you, and that if you should lose yourself to him, you will save your life.

But you hesitate.

Like Frodo before the fires of Mt. Doom, you stop. And you lift to your eyes this ring: it is your pride.

And even now my desperate plea that you cast the ring away is muffled by the heartbeat of pride. It has its many arguments: I am young and do not know what I am talking about; you are good enough to get to heaven without all this religious stuff; everyone interprets the Bible differently, so who's to say who's right; if you were to believe in Christ, you would have to confess that before now you have been a false believer, and that would embarrass you; if you were to believe in Christ, you would have to renounce all that you have heretofore built your life upon.

¹⁰ Acts 8:31.

Jesus speaks to you much as he spoke to the rich young ruler: “You lack one thing; go, sell your possessions, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

This is the moment of decision, when God says to you: “Take now your pride, your only pride, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

All that God requires of you this day is that you admit you are wrong. Paradise, paradise, I say, is the reward! It dangles but an inch before your nose, and will you not lift a humble hand to take it? Is your pride so precious to you that you will let it pull you down to hell?

Let go of your pride, I beg you! Do not be like a reasonless raccoon that will walk into a trap; do not despise reproof.

The truth is yours, if you just want it enough to prostrate your pride for it.

The voice of pride speaks to you still: “Do not listen to this; he is trying to play with your emotions. He is trying to pressure you into a decision so the church can put you down as a statistic. How many of the world’s smartest men disbelieve all of this? And will you give yourself up to it in a moment of duress?”

I do not know all else that pride is telling you, but I tell you, the eternal word of God is powerful enough to crush that greatest of all angelic and human vices. That is my confidence; the sword of the Spirit is levelled against your resistance, and the devil is troubled by it. I imagine he redoubles his efforts now.

So let me press again before your view Christ and him crucified—he, the truth, the incarnate message of God, speaks! Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. Do not delay, do not await a more opportune time—this too is a scheme of the enemy. Now is the opportune time, and not tomorrow.

Close with Christ, I urge you! Forget your pride, place your fingers in your ears and run to the wicket gate of salvation, crying, “Life! Life! Eternal life!” Determine in your heart that you will not leave this place until eternal life is yours; whomever you must speak to, whatever you must do, do not let your soul exit those doors in a Christless state.

If you love truth like this, enough to humble yourself before God, you will leave here a child of God.

Conclusion

Friends, I have urged you to love the truth for half an hour; outside these walls you will find vendors who will buy up your truth at a price, and they will plead with you for hour upon hour.

Convenience will offer you a great reward if you will compromise.

But let me end with this appeal, and may God permit it to remain with you through the assault.

When you grow weary of holding your Bible, know that you are holding Christ, the incarnate word of God. When you are ashamed to lift this book up, know that to lift it up is to lift up Christ. When you are tempted to lay this book down, know that to lay it down is to lay Christ down.

When you are compelled to spit upon this book at threat of your life, know that to pick it up and clean it of its defilement is to honor Christ with your life and your death.

When doubts assail your mind concerning the validity of this book, know that a hundred generations of philosophers and critics have withered away like grass in the sun, and the current generation will do the same, but Christ and his word remains.

When you open this book with a heart of faith, you are meeting with the friend of sinners, and when you study this book with a sincere mind, you are listening to the Rabbi speak.

And when the kingdoms of this earth, its institutions and governments and glories fail, when the sun forbears to shine and the moon refuses to give its light, when the stars of your stable life fall from the sky and the mountains are cast into the sea, to hold to this book in the chaos, is to rest yourself in the embrace of Jesus Christ.

So if anyone asks why we love this book and the knowledge it contains, you can tell them, "This is why."