

Adult Sunday School Class: A Christian Philosophy of Learning

What Do I Do With This Stuff?

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(Note: These notes are a lightly edited version of the notes that I used in teaching the class. The form is based on the style used by [Winston Churchill](#) for his speech notes.)

[Title slide up at the beginning]

Today is the fifth meeting of
“A Christian Philosophy of Learning.”

As most of you know,
we didn't meet last week,
because we had a special guest speaker
to a combined Sunday School class.

This worked out quite well,
because I was pretty much incapacitated
last Sunday morning
with a severe headache.

It also worked out well,
because the extra week
gave me some time
to reconsider my plans for the fifth class.

Instead of going ahead
to start looking at some of
the methods that God has given us
for acquiring and applying truth,
I've decided
to spend today's class
talking about concrete applications
of what we've covered so far.

So,
we'll try to answer today the question:
What do we do with this stuff?

Before we do that,
let's quickly review what we've discussed in
the first four classes.

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Recall that in the first week
we defined
“A Christian Philosophy of Learning”
to be
“A biblically-sound
comprehensive way of thinking about
acquiring and applying truth.”

I said that we'd call the elements of this way of thinking
valuable verities.

We've seen five of these verities so far.

Can someone name one of them?

[Continue until all 5 are named,
or the people give up,
and then

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Here are all five,
listed in the order we've covered them.

V_1^2 : A wise person
will continually seek
to acquire and apply truth
for the glory of God.
An unwise person will not.

V_2^2 : Truth
consists of all the propositions
that God affirms.

Remember
that a proposition is simply something that is true or false,
and that affirming a proposition
is to assert that it is true,
by both word and deed.

When we affirm a proposition,
we may be right,
or we may be wrong.

But when God affirms a proposition,
He is always right,
because He,
and He alone,
determines what is true,
and what is false.

V_3^2 : A truth is still a truth,
even if you do not believe it is true,
or if you do not know whether it is true,
or if God has not chosen to reveal that it is true.

Some propositions are revealed by God to be true.

"Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven",
is one example,
which is revealed by God to be true in the Bible.

This proposition is true
no matter how many people may deny it.

For some other propositions,
God has not chosen to reveal clearly
whether they are true.

This lack of clear revelation
in no way affects the truth of the propositions,
however.

Truth is not to be measured by what I know,
but by what God knows.

The fourth verity we discussed was

V_4^2 : The starting point
for acquiring and applying truth is regeneration.

That is,
without the direct intervention
of God's Spirit
on our souls,
we are unable to really grasp any truth.

As we discussed two weeks ago,
this verity doesn't mean
that the unregenerate are unable
to affirm true propositions;
but it does mean
that the unregenerate are unable
to have a firm foundation from which
they can be sure what truth really is,
and
that they are also unable
to affirm the propositions of the Gospel.

The fifth verity,
which we also discussed two weeks ago was:

V_5^2 : No person
ever reaches a point
where he should stop acquiring and applying truth.

In this discussion
we recognized that different people
have different abilities to acquire and apply truth,
but that each person,
except perhaps in certain pathological cases,
can always improve his knowledge of truth.

Those are the five verities we've discussed so far.

Are there any questions about these?

[Next slide]

In addition to the verities,
we've also talked about some untruths.

In particular,
we've talked about 3 categories of untruths,
which are so common
that I've labeled them ubiquitous untruths.

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Here are the 3 categories,
using nearly the same slide I used
when we first talked about them,
Including examples for each,
which I won't go over again this morning.

U^2_1 : Denying what God affirms

U^2_2 : Affirming what God denies

U^2_3 : Affirming when God's position is not clear

Remember that we discussed the fact
that all 3 of these are wrong,
and I suggested that we
in the conservative, reformed community
tend to be most guilty of the last one.

That is,
we're inclined sometimes
to claim as an indisputable truth
that for which the evidence is
not conclusive.

Are there any questions about these?

[Next slide]

Before we start to talk about applications
of all these things we discussed in the first four weeks,
I need to talk a bit about
a topic from the last class.

In that class,
I asked the question,
"Are there varieties of truth?"

I answered the question
with an emphatic, "No,"
based on the valuable verity

that truth consists of
the propositions that God affirms —
that is,
there's only one type of truth,
namely, what God says it is.

After the class,
several folks suggested that “Yes”
is the right answer.

These folks suggested varieties of truth
such as
Revealed in Scripture
and revealed in natural world;
or
Chemistry
and biology
and mechanical engineering
and so on;
or
Clearly revealed
and not-so-clearly revealed
and not revealed.

It isn't necessarily wrong
to call these varieties of truth,
but I suggest
that it might be better
to refer to these as varieties of something else,
such as
methods of revelation for the first category,
subject matter for the second category,
and strengths of evidence for the third category.

The reason that I prefer this approach
is that our current society is so filled
with the relativistic notion
of “what's true for you may not be true for me,”
that it seems best to me
to not use the term “variety of truth”
in any sentence other than one
denies there is any such thing.

This is just a personal preference.

It is possible to use the phrase in a correct way,
just as it is possible to use the word “heart:” in a correct way,
but the phrase, like the word,
is far more often mis-used than used correctly,
so I prefer to not use it at all.

Are there any questions
about these varieties of varieties?

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Some of you may have attended all four classes,
or have heard this review of what we've covered,
and be thinking
"So what?"

I realize that much of what we've discussed
in the first 4 classes has been fairly abstract,
and the language I've used
might not be the language you normally use.

So,
some of you are certainly asking questions like:

Does any of this apply to my life today?

Can I use any of it to glorify God?

In my original plan for the class,
I didn't intend to discuss applications at this point,
but there are plenty of applications
that can be drawn from what we have discussed,
so we'll go ahead and do that today.

I have three applications that I will discuss,
then if there's time at the end,
I'll give you a chance to suggest
some additional applications.

[Next Slide]

One application of what we've talked about
is as a sign of a person's spiritual condition.

That is,
**one way in which I can judge
my spiritual condition
is by considering the extent to which
I am seeking to acquire and apply truth.**

No seeking implies spiritual stagnation.

Fervent seeking implies spiritual growth.

This same principle
applies to assessing the spiritual condition of others.

Let's look at some Scripture passages
that relate directly to this application:

Will someone please read
1 Corinthians 3:1-3?

Hebrews 5:12-6:1a?

Ephesians 4:11-16?

The first two of these
are addressed to people who are not
seeking to apply and acquire truth,
and thus are not growing.

(1 Cor 3:1-3) And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. {2} I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, {3} for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

(Heb 5:12-6:1a) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. {13} For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. {14} But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.) Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

Now, the passage from Ephesians
talks about how things ought to be.

(Eph 4:11-16) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; {13} until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. {14} As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; {15} but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, {16} from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

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Here's a question for you to consider:
Which of these passages
best describes me?

Am I a Corinthians baby,
an Hebrews elementary student,
or an Ephesians mature man?

That's one application;
are there any questions
or comments,
before I propose another one?

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Another application of what we've studied so far is
as a spur to superior scholarship.

**I should be
a more diligent and accomplished student
than a non-believer of comparable natural abilities.**

Francis Schaeffer put it this way
in his book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*:
“Evangelical Christians
should be
better scholars than non-Christians
because they know
that there is truth
in contrast to the relativism
and narrow reductionism
of every discipline.”

In this quote
Schaeffer is using the term scholar quite broadly,
just as I’m using the term student quite broadly.

Every one of us is a scholar,
every one of us is a student —
our last application should convince you of that —
in some areas.

And in every one of these areas,
a Christian should be more diligent
and more accomplished
in acquiring and applying truth
than a non-Christian
of comparable ability.

Schaeffer was not saying,
and I’m not saying either,
that every Christian
will be better
than every non-Christian.

Clearly,
there are limits based on God-given ability,
but within those limits,
Christians ought to be the best they can be,
in whatever they do.

Let’s look at two passages
that address this issue.

The first,
1 Kings 4:29-34,
talks about Solomon,
who was given extra special ability by God,
and who used this
to affirm true propositions in many different areas.

[Will someone read that passage please?](#)

(1 Ki 4:29-34) Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. {30} And Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. {31} For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. {32} He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. {33} And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. {34} And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

Thus Solomon,
 who is certainly a special case
 in the amount of ability given him by God,
 but who, nevertheless, I think,
 illustrates the general principle we're discussing.

Someone please read
 Psalm 119:98-100

(Psa 119:98-100) Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. {99} I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation. {100} I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Thy precepts.

This passage, I think,
 speaks directly to our application —
 a believer can excel —
 again within the limits of his abilities.

This is the way things should be.

This is the way demanded by
 a biblically sound,
 comprehensive way of thinking about
 acquiring and applying truth.

Sadly,
 it is not the way of the church today.

Instead,
 I believe it is correct to say this:

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Not having a biblical view of scholarship
 is a major failing of the church today.

I'm not sure that the 'a'
 ought not be a 'the.'

Examples of this abound.

As a group,
 conservative Christians —
 reformed ones included —

tend to accept and promote bad science
in the name of fidelity to the Scripture.

It ought not be this way.

Lest anyone misunderstand what I'm saying,
I am a young earth creationist,
because, I believe,
that is what the Scripture demands.

Nevertheless,
that doesn't keep me from being
as critical
of most of creation science
as the most ardent old earth evolutionist,
because much of creation science
is simply junk,
rightly deserving ridicule.

Christians should have the highest scientific standards,
and be the least willing to accept as fact
that which has inadequate support.

As a group,
conservative Christians —
reformed ones included —
have adopted an attitude towards education
that finds it perfectly acceptable
to fail to meet the needs
of the brightest students,
and have falsely labeled elitist
those few who recognize
that such an attitude
has no support in Scripture.

It ought not be this way.

Christians should be at the forefront
of developing ways to help
those to whom God has given great gifts
learn to use fully
those gifts for God's glory,
at least as much as
we should be at the forefront
of developing ways to help
those to whom God has not given many gifts
learn to use what they do have
for his glory.

As a group,
conservative Christians —
reformed ones included —

have been quite gullible,
and unable to distinguish between
those who know what they're talking about
and those who do not.

Y2K paranoia is perhaps the most recent example.

It ought not be this way.

Christians should be the least gullible,
with high standards of proof for all claims,
and with a willingness to listen to those with knowledge
about areas in which they do not have knowledge.

I could go on,
but I've probably already offended enough of you,
that I should pause and ask if
[there any questions](#)
[or comments,](#)
[before I propose one more application?](#)

[Next Slide]

The third application I want to mention is
that these truths we've studied so far
should be a stimulant to humility.

**The gap between my knowledge
and God's knowledge
is vastly bigger
than the gap
between my knowledge
and anyone else's.**

Pick any area of truth.

For that area,

pick the person in the room who has acquired and applied
the most truth in this area,

and

pick the person in the room who has acquired and applied
the least truth in this area.

The difference between these two people
will be negligible compared to the difference
between them and God.

So, every single one of us must affirm that
Pride in the depth of my knowledge,
or in the extent of my ability
to apply that knowledge,
is not justified.

Also,

because we recognize that the starting point
for truth is regeneration,
each of us must affirm that

I have no basis for feeling intellectually superior
to those who do not understand
the truth of the Gospel.

I am not a Christian
because I'm smarter than others
who are unable to understand the Gospel.
I am unable to understand it either,
apart from the work of God's Spirit.

There's no place for pride here.

Are there any questions or comments about this application?

If you think about the last two applications a bit,
you might be inclined to think that they are
somewhat contradictory.

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That is,
we have an evident enigma.

This enigma arises because
[advance slide]
biblically mandated striving for excellence
suggests that
differences in abilities are significant,

whereas
[advance slide]
biblically mandated humility
suggests that
differences in abilities are insignificant.

We seem to have a conflict here.

We know that the Bible does not contradict itself,
so how can we resolve this evident enigma?

We resolve by realizing
that we're talking about two different types of significance here.

[advance slide]

Differences in ability are significant
in daily living,
but differences in ability are insignificant
In standing before God.

Consider this example.

If we need to answer the question,
 "Is the argument given for making this particular decision
 a logically sound argument?"
 we should give preference to the answer
 given by someone who knows logic,
 over the answer
 given by someone who does not know logic.

If we don't do this,
 and we give equal weight to the answer given by both people,
 we are not being true to Scriptural teaching;
 instead of being wise,
 we're being quite unwise.

But we should not
 consider the person who knows logic
 to be superior before God to the one who doesn't,
 nor should that person consider himself superior either.

If we do this,
 then we aren't being true to Scripture,
 and if he does it,
 he's not being true to Scripture either.

So,
 there's not really a contradiction at all,
 instead there's a careful balance.

Now,
 it tends to be the case in the church today,
 that most people get off balance on this point
 in one direction or the other.

By far the most common error
 is to forget that differences of ability are significant in daily living;
 I've seen untold numbers of really poor decisions made
 by people giving equal significance to opinions
 from qualified and unqualified people.

But the opposite error,
 although less common,
 is just as much an error.

[Are there any questions or comments before we close?](#)

As I said earlier,
 there are lots of applications we could discuss;
 I hope that you've found the ones we've chosen
 to discuss helpful.

[Are there any questions or comments
before I wrap up this morning?](#)

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Next week we really will
start talking about how to go about
acquiring and applying new truth.

Your homework for next week is to
answer these questions:

If I affirm that the Bible is the Word of God,
is there anything else that I also need to affirm,
before I can affirm that I am a sinner?

If so, what else do I need to affirm?

Also, remember Quote ID challenge #2:

Who said,
"If a picture is worth a thousand words,
then why did God give us His Word,
instead of His drawings?"

Here's another hint:

The person is,
at least at the time of this writing,
alive today.

That's all for today.

Thanks for your attention.