

The First Pillar of Christian Epistemology: God's Knowledge

The unchanging and perfect God "knows". What he knows is Truth: Absolute Truth, Unchanging Truth. Because He knows, there is such a thing as Knowledge. We can have Knowledge because God does. Any Knowledge we may ever gain originates in His Knowledge. It is part of what He knows. This is the starting point to Christian Epistemology.

God's knowledge is perfect and complete knowledge of everything (Omniscience). God's Knowledge is knowable to human beings, not exhaustively, but truly. The oft heard plea that we can not know answers to the big questions about Life ["Who's to say?" "Nobody can know." "It is all a crap shoot." or, at the very least, "We can never be sure"] is hereby rejected. So is despair and cynicism. We are to learn what God already knows. We are to discover His Truth (again, not exhaustively, but truly).

The Second Pillar: Revelation

Dutch Reformed or Neo-Calvinist Epistemology is not Modernist, a product of the Enlightenment. (In contrast, much Conservative Evangelical Epistemology is Rationalist.) ABSOLUTE, FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH is not arrived at by Reason (deduction or induction), by Experience (empirical data) or some kind of intuition, i.e.- we do not come upon or discover true Truth by

- evidence that can be tested
- concepts that are self-evident, self-justifying or innate
- trial and error: concepts that work, they solve problems

RATHER- We know THE ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES AND WORLD VIEW through Revelation. True Truth is justified by Revelation. Foundational Knowledge (ABSOLUTE TRUTH) comes directly from God. It is revealed by Him. God reveals what He knows. He reveals His Mind (the Logos) for example-

Matthew 16:16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

1 Corinthians 2:9 as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Galatians 1:11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Knowledge that comes from God, Foundational Truth, true Knowledge, is spiritual. It is God centered. It enables us to know God experientially. This is beyond propositional knowledge "that" and functional knowledge "how". This is knowledge "of" the immediate, personal experience of God. This Knowledge begins at the moment of

regeneration. From that moment, “We know the Lord.”. This is also moral knowledge, leading us to become like God in our relationships and way of living. It is meant to shape our character, to make us Christ-like. In fact, becoming like God, like Christ, is the test as to whether we have True Knowledge.

These criteria or “tests” of Knowledge are not designed by human minds. There is a place for reason, as we shall see later; but it is not the measure of true Truth. They are a matter of revelation and this Revelation is inscripturated in the Bible. This concept is absolutely critical. It is another major distinctive of all [Reformed] Christian Epistemology-

The Third Pillar: Revelation is inscripturated: Special Revelation, i.e.- the Christian Bible (or New Covenant Scripture)

Why do we believe the Bible is this Revelation? There are four possible answers.

1. Pragmatism- The Bible works, it helps solve problems

2. A posteriori Induction- We have evidence that can be tested to prove it

3. A priori Deduction- We just know it is. It is self-evident

OR-

4. The Holy Spirit within the mind of a Believer. The Spirit illuminates. Faith (also a work of the Spirit) receives the Illumination. In this way alone [Scripture, Illumination, Faith] the Believer “knows”. S/he begins to recognize the Voice of God (John 10:4,16, 27;18:37) at the moment of saving faith, in which the Holy Spirit comes to abide within the Believer. Reread that carefully and note how it is very different than the third answer above. IThis answer is not fideism.

Answer number four is correct. Again, we are not evidentialist Rationalists nor pragmatists. If the latter, the Authority of Scripture would depend on our subjective and changing needs. If the former, the Authority of Scripture would be damaged if not destroyed should any of the so-called evidence became unreliable or bogus. The Authority of Scripture comes from its divine authorship, from within not from without. God’s Word does not need our attempts to prove it to be true. That would make the Man the Measure of the Book.

Fourth Pillar: the priority of a priori Knowledge

The Revelation of TRUTH comes to us through thousands of words. The Universal is known through many particulars. Their meaning, often one by one, must be unpacked. They must be related and connected in some way. The Bible is not a systematic book. It has a number of literary genres. Knowing, by faith, that these words, all together, are the TRUTH of God, guides us in our understanding of the words. We read them all in that Light.

That faith is crucial to how we approach the words of the Bible. We do not approach the Bible as though it is a human book like all others. For example, inasmuch as it is the revelation of God's Mind, it can not be self-contradictory. Inasmuch as it is His Truth, It must be without error. We accept miracles and fulfilled prophecies because God is capable of them and He is revealing Himself to us. We use an a priori approach to Scripture. We deduce many things from our presupposition, on faith, that the Bible is, indeed, the Word of God.

However, studying all the words (the particulars) will lead us to posteriori induction as we seek to go deeper into what the Word of God means for our lives today. While the priori sets the main rules of interpretation, we will use all the tools available under those rules for a posteriori inductive Bible study.

Fifth Pillar of Christian Epistemology: Foundational Knowledge over all other Knowledge

Although Revelation in Scripture is TRUTH, it is not exhaustive Truth. It is Foundational and spiritual. There is always more to know about Reality and the world God has created. This is knowledge gained apart from the Bible. However, revealed TRUTH precedes all other Knowledge (Truth). Yes, we are Presuppositionalists. Our presuppositions, about what the Bible is, set the rules for how we proceed. TRUTH is foundational for all other knowledge. Yes, we are Foundationalists. This, for example, determines our approach to Origins and Cosmology. We can not be philosophical Naturalists. We do not need to prove, a posteriori, that there is Intelligent Design in the Universe. We know that

a priori

. This is another absolutely crucial characteristic of (Reformed) Christian Epistemology.

Much of our real world knowledge will be inductive, a posteriori

. The Christian goes beyond Revelation. Starting from it or build on it, he (she) uses mind (Reason, Logic) and experience to know as much as s/he can of Reality. Both the manifestation of that Reality, and our understanding of it, will be in flux. Our real world knowledge will be constantly changing and growing.. It will not be absolute or static.

It is important to understand this relationship between Knowledge which is based in Revelation and all other knowledge. They are not separate. They are not equal. They are not to be contradictory. Many Christians fail to see this relationship. There is to be no separation between Faith and Reason, Value and Fact. Nothing is neutral or autonomous. The Knowledge that comes by Revelation takes priority over Knowledge gained by inductive and deductive reasoning, by the “Scientific Method”, by personal experience and by intuition. While Revealed Knowledge [TRUTH] is primarily spiritual, we need it to inform our intellect. Our intellect must conform to it. Revelation (Scripture) is the ultimate authority and

gives us the ultimate purpose and meaning of all things- the “Big Picture”, our World View. It gives us understanding of the meaning and purpose of all the world in which we live.

Public and private Schooling can give us real world knowledge by which we can reasonable function; but apart from inscripturated Revelation, it can give us none of the above. Thus what is usually considered “Education” is sorely lacking and deficient in the most important matters. Worse than that, the autonomous mind is an enemy of God and true Truth. [This is the Doctrine of Antithesis.] This means that the education provided by autonomous minds will not only be deficient, but itself inimical to God. This is why Dutch Calvinists maintain their own schools.