

## KNOWLEDGE IN THE CONTEXT OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION (talking points)

(1). The “spiritual life” of the Christian is not normally thought of as an arena in which knowledge is important. It is not thought of as significantly *conducted in terms of* knowledge, or as a major *source of knowledge* available to all serious inquirers. This is a relatively recent condition and one to be greatly deplored.

(2). Why does it matter whether or not we think of the spiritual life (spiritual formation or “growth in grace”) as a possible domain of knowledge? It matters because knowledge involves truth and open method on common ground. Do those matter?

What it means to deny that Christian life involves or provides knowledge--That there is no *method* in the spiritual life. Method requires knowledge and makes *planning* possible.

(3). How does the issue of knowledge in and of Christian life *relate to the work of apologetics*? Try this: The task of the apologete is to provide insight and knowledge to answer questions posed by serious inquirers who genuinely wish to understand what followers of Christ believe, live through, and practice—and why they do that? The inquirer is often one who already professes faith in Christ. Apologetics is a helping ministry, pastoral, not just for the unbeliever.

(4). Reflection on 1 Peter 3:14-15 in the light of that understanding. “If indeed you suffer because of righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear their intimidation, and don’t be upset. Just hold Christ as Lord in a special place in your hearts, being always prepared to explain to everyone who asks you why and how you have the hope that is in you.” On the basis of your knowledge of Christ and your life with him, you bring knowledge to others about how the spiritual life works and what that knowledge could mean for them. You explain the interior or spiritual factors of your hope.

(5). Knowledge in any area is the capacity to represent (speak of, deal with) the relevant subject matter *as it is*, on an appropriate basis of thought and experience—not to exclude good authority. Some advantages of this understanding of knowledge.

(6). The crucial importance of solid work in the theory of knowledge, and some accomplishments in that field that help with knowledge of the spiritual life. Plantinga and Alston.

(7). Pascal: Beyond “the Wager.” Knowledge by acquaintance with spiritual life.

(8). Knowledge alone brings responsibilities and rights (authority) **to act, to direct action, to formulate policy and direct its implementation, and to teach**. The person who has knowledge of spiritual life in Christ teaches and leads with verifiable authority concerning it.

(9). Many people will never accept that the spiritual life involves knowledge for growth, or that it is a source of knowledge for anyone who really wants to know. MY MAIN INITIAL CONCERN IS WITH THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY ADVOCATES AND PRACTITIONERS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN CHRIST—that they should know and present the spiritual life *as a field of knowledge*, not just of causation or erratic influence.

(10) A familiar passage from Jesus about the centrality of knowledge to spiritual growth and transformation. John 8:31-32. The tendency is to cut this down to “the truth will make you free.” See for example his teaching about anger and contempt in Matt. 5:21-26

(11). The emergence of the field of “Spiritual Formation.” The apologetic problem it addresses (“Why aren’t Christians better?”), and the necessity of knowledge of and in the spiritual life. How do people “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”? Note that we are commanded to *do* that. How are we to set about doing it? With knowledge or without? Without method?

(12). Some great exemplars of knowledge in the spiritual life from the past: Ignatius of Loyola, Jeremy Taylor, Richard Baxter, John Wesley. The need to bring this knowledge into the present. Spiritual Formation in Christ *has* been routinely done and can be routinely done now. The knowledge is there. Decision and resolve are also required, but depend upon knowledge for their effect. “Zeal without knowledge” won’t work.

(13). All of this is related to the general and perennial human problem of achieving good moral character. Augustine responds to Plato’s failure. Loving your neighbors and your enemies, for example, is something that develops only through a definite course of knowledge, experience, and practice in the spiritual life.

(14). Today—speaking now of the world in general—this problem of achieving good moral character is a totally unsolved problem in our society. Few people are even willing to address it. What about, even, our Christian Institutions? Our churches and para-church groups? Do they seriously address the issue of achieving good moral character? That would be growth in Christlikeness.

(15). It is the people of Christ who must be **the teachers of the nations**: “Make disciples...teaching them in such a way that they do all things I have commanded.” For this, *knowledge* of how the spiritual life is conducted and of its spiritual resources is necessary.

(16). Just think what this would do for the task of the apologete for Christ. Imagine there being accessible, convincing explanations of “the hope that is within you,” etc., and the public display of multitudes of disciples who are far advanced in spiritual maturity because they have effectively combined grace with action on the basis of knowledge. What would that do for the work of apologetics?

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