

# 4 BY FAITH WE CAN KNOW

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**THIS LESSON WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:**

Objective 1. Indicate what faith believes.

Objective 2. State how one can know things by faith.

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*My friends we mistake a historical faith for a true faith, wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God . . . My dear friends, there must be a principle wrought in the heart by the Spirit of the living God.*  
(Whitefield 1771, para. 14–15)

*We are not capable of producing the dynamic of faith, only of receiving it. In the same manner that homeowners don't produce electricity, but only consume it, we do not produce faith; we only utilize it. – Judson Cornwall*

*"Unbelief is natural to the sinning heart; saving faith is the gift of God"*  
(Tenney 1997, 123).

Postmodern art and sculpture illustrate the notion that people and their communities create their own truths, and they lack concern with accurate correspondence to external realities as they express themselves to others. Michael Giardina's poetry also typifies postmodernity. Scaring the female ferret out of Giardina's saltshaker expresses a "truth" he creates that cannot possibly be true for others. His poetry also illustrates the difference in worldview between hardcore postmodernists and conservative evangelicals. Those in the evangelical community of faith in Christ testify that we have discovered a way to know ahistorical,

cross-cultural, absolute truth that has objective, universal meaning and implications. This truth is revealed in the Bible which tells how we can know trans-rational, metaphysical realities with complete certainty. This way of knowing is something that neither modernism nor postmodernism offers. Hebrews 11:1–3 says the following:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Faith, by God's design, opens the way for discovery of spiritual truth and reality. This is a key principle. God invites us to seek Him and discover Him. Our faith, then, leads to deep assurance [Gk. *Hupostasis*] of things hoped for and the conviction (or evidence) [Gk. *Elegchos*] of things not seen. Both of the Greek words used in this sentence are strong in their meaning, indicating certainty. F. F. Bruce observes that "physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things; faith is the organ which enables people . . . to see the invisible order" (1964, 279). Consequently, people of Christian faith are able to perceive and understand things that cannot be verified within the cave of rationalistic empiricism.

Those who have never explored outside of the cave sometimes picture Christian faith as a form of make believe. Were this caricature true, faith would be a form of psychosis, but faith is not the product of human imagination. First, faith is a response to God's initiative so what it believes is determined by God's revelation of himself and His truth. Real faith does not create its own content. It is like a radio tuner. A tuner cannot produce the music, sports, and talk shows that we listen to; it can only receive the content that is determined and broadcast by a source outside of itself. Likewise, faith's content is determined by God and Christian faith is as reliable as the source of its content.

This tuner-like quality of faith can be seen throughout Scripture. Abraham did not believe he would have a son until God spoke (Genesis 15:1–6). Mary did not believe she would give birth to the savior until God revealed this to her through the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26–38). After this revelation Mary declared, "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Likewise Paul believed he would be saved from shipwreck after God revealed this to him through an angel (Acts 27:21–26). Paul did not believe

the ship would be saved, however, since this had not been specifically revealed to him. Christians are not indulging in fictional daydreams, the magic of believing, or the power of positive thinking. They are responding affirmatively to a genuine, specific revelation from God.

Saving faith works the same way. It is simply faith which believes the message of salvation. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our need of a savior (John 16:18), teaches the truths of the Gospel to our understanding and our hearts (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10–13), witnesses to the gospel through signs and wonders (Acts 2:17–18; Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 2:4, 12:10), and confirms to us that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). Some of what the Bible reports and teaches cannot be verified empirically (for instance, we cannot make historical events such as creation or the birth of Jesus in Nazareth repeat themselves for our scientific observation), but faith's knowledge is just as certain as empirical knowledge because the experience involved is every bit as real. It is just an experience of things outside of the cave.

Rabi Maharaj, a Hindu who had been trained as a holy Yogi, experienced Christ as he knelt and prayed at a Christian meeting. He describes the new knowledge that came to him on that occasion:

Before I finished, I knew that Jesus wasn't just another one of several million gods. He was the God for whom I had hungered. He Himself was the Creator. Yet, He loved me enough to become a man and die for my sins. With that realization, tons of darkness seemed to lift and a brilliant light flooded my soul. (Death 1994)

I experienced this same supernatural certainty over 31 years ago when one night I read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5–7. When I read the part in which Jesus said “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7), these words came supernaturally alive in my heart and I KNEW that I could call on God and have an audience with Him. For the first time in my life I really, sincerely prayed, and it seemed that all of heaven descended upon me. Tears streamed down my face and I wondered why I had waited so long to find something so good. During that time of prayer I committed my life to God.

Countless others have experienced this same “out of the cave” knowledge. Saving faith is not guesswork or fantasy. Not only do real historical facts

exist that undergird Christian faith and make a reasonable response to God, but also saving faith presents the postmodern world with a kind of knowledge that supersedes both the naturally empirical and the naturally subjective. Speaking of the heavenly, saving wisdom, Paul writes,

No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:9–12)

Because of the active role of the Holy Spirit who is the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17, 15:26, and 16:13), we can declare on divine authority the message that you can “know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Norman Geisler and Paul Feinberg (1980) point out that divine knowledge as found in God’s Word (and, we might add, divinely given faith) is not subject to the weaknesses and flaws of merely human knowledge that moderns and postmoderns so frequently point out:

Among God’s attributes are omniscience, truth, perfect goodness, and omnipotence. Each of these attributes is crucial to the point we are making. Human knowledge is probable and fallible in part because our knowledge is partial. Sometimes we are wrong simply because we are ignorant of some relevant fact or facts. Such cannot be the case with God because God knows everything, both the actual and the possible (Ps. 139:1–6). Moreover, God’s knowledge is true. That is, it corresponds to reality (Exod. 34:6; Num 23:19; Deut. 32:4). Thus, neither ignorance nor error characterize[s] God’s knowledge. (130)

We can have genuine encounter and ongoing relationship with God, as the Bible repeatedly confirms.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (John 10:14).

“This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10).

“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).

“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8).

The Bible also frequently describes this relationship as people experience it. Old Testament characters such as Abraham, Moses, and Noah conversed with God. David frequently described his relationship with God in the Psalms.

“Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11).

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground” (Psalm 143:10).

“But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds” (Psalm 73:28).

“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalm 16:11).

On two occasions (1 Samuel 10:5–12 and 19:23–24) even Saul was overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit who caused him to break forth into ecstatic prophecy. And in the New Testament, the entire book of Acts brims with a dynamic relationship between the believers and their Lord. The Holy Spirit speaks directly to Philip in Acts 8:29, Peter in Acts 10:19, and Paul in Acts 23:11. There are many other instances of spiritual gifts, divine guidance, miracles, angelic visitations, etc. in Acts, all indicative of a dynamic relationship.

Faith does not come from seeking faith; it comes as a by-product of seeking God. Specific doctrinal issues are then worked out over time since the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Word of God and illuminates it to us. Reading and studying the Bible becomes a genuine delight, as the Spirit teaches us through the Word. The written word then anchors our faith in an objective, factual revelation.

*“There is also the possibility of certainty, . . . because God has spoken to us clearly and intelligibly” (DeYoung 2008, 40).*

*“The very affirmation that all truth is unknowable is itself presented as a truth affirmation. As a truth statement purporting that no truth statements can be made it undercuts itself” (Geisler 1976, 133–134).*

*The antithesis of “personal-revelation” and “propositional-revelation” can only result in an equally unscriptural contrast of personal faith with doctrinal belief. It is now often said that belief in Christ is something wholly different from truths or propositions. But to lose intelligible revelation spells inescapable loss of any supernatural authorized doctrinal assertions about God. (Henry 1979, 436)*

## TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. How would you define faith?

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2. Do you desire to know God and His truth? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Is God capable of revealing absolute truth to people He has created?

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4. How can one actually know God and His truth?

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