



## Questions Asked: Knowledge Puffs Up, Love Builds Up

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While ministering to fellow Christians of the growing need of apologetics and a robust knowledge of Christ, I have often been encountered with this question: If the Bible says "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up," why should I do apologetics or grow in knowledge? I would like to give an answer.

It is important when we quote Scripture that we handle it properly. The first rule in maintaining the meaning of a verse is to look at the context of it. The passage used as the objection above is 1 Corinthians 8. The context is Paul speaking to the Corinthians about eating meat offered to idols. The freedom that comes in Christ recognizes that idols are simply shaped stones and whittled woods. Neither the stones nor the woods used in the sacrifices in Corinth were toxic to the body; however, used as idols they were toxic to the soul. Paul is teaching the Corinthians that while idolatry is a problem, cooked meat is not.

But here comes the Apostle's point: If someone were to eat this meat with someone who did not have a proper knowledge of the nature of things, then she might identify the meat too closely with the idols. Doing this may cause her own conscience to sin (Romans 14 speaks of something similar). Paul admonishes that when it comes to a situation like this one, it is better to love your Christian neighbor by abstaining than hurt her by boasting and indulging. Thus, "knowledge puffs up but love builds up."

In no way was Paul encouraging his audience to grow in ignorance and misunderstanding. In fact, it was knowledge and understanding in the ways of Christ that helped them see the cruelty in flaunting their freedom before others in areas of conscience.

Along with the objection, some have added that the study of philosophy is also a problem. "Philosophy is man's thinking," it has been said. But we need to be careful that we do not confuse philosophy with the kinds of ideas that have hijacked philosophy and used the same name. "Philosophy" has the word "sophia" in it, which means "wisdom." The Scripture emphasizes continually that wisdom begins with the

fear of the Lord. It is grounded in God's way of thinking and is a precious commodity in a world gone awry. The other root word in "philosophy" is "phileo," which means "friendship love." In short, "philosophy" could be defined as "wisdom is my friend." I believe that when we are talking about philosophy that God is immediately concerned we take this meaning. The only alternative is a friendship with foolishness.

Furthermore, Solomon, who was bestowed the gifts of wisdom, fills his Proverbs with encouragement that knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are like gold and silver that will protect you from evil and keep you on the pathway of truth. In fact, in Proverbs 3 Solomon goes so far as to say that when we grow in wisdom our relationship with God actually grows: "The Lord will be your confidence" (Proverbs 3:21-26).

You see, the need to grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom is directly connected to finding out what God is like. When we know what He is like, our faith grows wider and deeper, our emotions are better marshaled, our confidence becomes bolder, and our foolishness diminishes. It will help us in our daily lives of prayer, worship, and

love. It will increase the meaningfulness of our work and help us draw connections in seeing God's hand moving in the world. In fact, when knowledge is appropriately applied it causes us to grow in humility, not pride. We see how small we are in God's economy, and how gracious God is to us. And when the opportunities come, we will be ready to tell our neighbor what God is like by clearing away some of the bushes that blind him. This is the glimmering reward of knowledge.

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