

## Introduction

There are good reasons to be less sure in our convictions at times and for differences to exist among believers: a) we are at different stages of sanctification with different levels of insight, b) the Lord reveals things to each believer in stages and we are to live by what we know waiting on the Lord to reveal more to us: **Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you** (Phil 3.15), c) and many subjective factors affect our grasp of truth: biases, perspective or lack thereof on Scripture and its application to our lives, general education and biblical education regarding facts, themes, and definitions; degrees of patience and perseverance in wrestling with the Lord in prayer while wrestling with the Scriptures; sinful habits that work against growth in understanding and against the honest application of the graces of open-minded humility, and so forth. *What might you add?*

How, then, do we arrive at truth for ourselves and promote it in others (as the 9th implies)?

We arrive at truth in a context and in stages by humble-obedient-effort & the Spirit's blessing. We come to know the truth and truths of Scripture in the following ways.

(1) By the testimony of the Holy Spirit (initially and lifelong)

The Holy Spirit set us apart by giving us faith and full conviction that the apostolic word is truly the word of God: **And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers** (1 Th 2.13) and **For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,<sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake** (1 Th 2.4-5). Therefore, Christians know, subjectively, that there is objective truth "out there" before them in the sixty-six books of God's word. Ultimately, given the fact that confusing and contrary views abound, what makes us so sure that we (as individuals and as the church in the entire time between) are making progress in the truth? We are sure for one primary reason: we are sure because of our Lord's promise to sanctify us by the word by His Spirit through the enlightenment of the eyes of our understanding in stages until we receive our inheritance: **In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,<sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,<sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,<sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints** (Eph 1.13-18).

(2) By recognition of our subjectivity, sinfulness, and fallibility

Hence, we will reexamine our beliefs repeatedly as an essential core principle. With this is the importance of loyalty to your conscience regarding how you live and what you believe in balance with the need to rightly inform the conscience by the help of pastor and church.

(3) By prayer, study, and faithful attendance to pastoral preaching and teaching

Q: When is pastoral preaching and teaching by fallible pastors true, given that we no longer have apostles today who unilaterally tell us what God says? Answer: when preaching and teaching conform to God's speech in the sixty-six books of Scripture. This elevates the principle of sola scriptura (Scripture alone is the standard of Christianity).

Q: How do I know (how does each Christian know) when this conformity exists?

Again, we remind ourselves of all the subjective factors in which we are to always remain open to new insights that come by fresh meditation on old solutions. Accordingly, the answer is that we know the truth in stages, better and better, through a process of growth in grace by the work of the Holy Spirit who has revealed the truth of Scripture to us and who continues to reveal more to us for our maturing (Phil 3.15).

Q: What is a balanced way to view conviction and assurance?

Being assured rightly and genuinely involves fellowship with God, confession of sin, repentance, the pursuit of holiness, prayer, taking up of God's appointed means of grace (diligent listening to preaching, singing, giving, praying, reading of Scripture, and observing of the sacraments), and studying to show ourselves approved of God in fulfillment of the priesthood of all believers. Therefore, Christians may know, truly know, various truths but, at times, they may lack assurance regarding them; the dynamics are much bigger than intellectual development.

Q: What is the job of pastors?

In this context, pastors patiently teach by exhortation and correction **preach the word...reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.**<sup>3</sup>**For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,**<sup>4</sup>**and will turn away from listening to the truth** (2 Tim 4.2-4). They are duty bound to the Lord to expose error in a firm and decisive way: **For an overseer, as God's steward...must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it** (Titus 1.7-9).

Q: What is the job of flocks?

The job of believer-priests is to test all things looking for the good; otherwise they quench the Spirit and despise God's word: **Do not quench the Spirit.**<sup>20</sup>**Do not despise prophecies,**<sup>21</sup>**but test everything; hold fast what is good** (1 Thess 5.19-21). Reexamine all but not all at once. This is easier said than done; it is easier to talk about others being open to us than for us to be open to them. This is harder to do when things we believe are challenged.

(4) By one-anothering

For short, we gain assurance in what we know by engaging a process of learning in a context of mutual exhortation of believers, especially because of the deceitfulness of sin: **But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin** (Heb 3.13). That is the foundation for preserving and promoting true knowledge in ourselves and others. It is important to recognize that human interaction, eyeball to eyeball, is a matter of trust in the Lord and openness before Him (a difficult but important lesson to learn in walking with God on this earth).

## Conclusion

We must seek to find; we must put forth prayerful effort and the Lord promises to do His work in us through the diligent use of His appointed means according to His purpose for our good and His own glory.

Note: cf. 9th.Application to Postconservatism on the Web Site for some applications to the postconservative evangelical church movement (PCE).