

Doctrine of the Knowledge of God

Lecture Outline

Objects of Knowledge

- I. The Biblical World-view as a Christian Philosophy
 - A. Divisions of philosophy
 1. Metaphysics, ontology: being
 2. Epistemology: knowledge
 3. Value Theory: ethics, aesthetics, economics, etc.
 - B. Interdependence of these: where would you begin?
 1. To study being, you must have some idea of how knowledge of being is possible. Same for studying values.
 2. To study human knowledge, you must have some understanding of the world (being), and of the values we bring to bear on knowledge. (Knowledge is what we *ought* to believe or what we are *permitted* to believe.)
 3. To study values, you must know what is valuable: the world and knowledge.
 4. So metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics are perspectively related.
 - a. They are not distinct subject matters; each includes the others.
 - b. Each can be seen as a perspective on the whole of reality.

- II. God and the World (Metaphysics, Ontology)
 - A. The creator-creature distinction.
 1. We are not God, vs. pantheism, new age monism.
 2. God is not a creature, but the sovereign Lord of all.
 - B. God is involved with us as *Lord*.
 1. He controls whatever comes to pass, Eph. 1:11. Supreme power.
 2. He speaks with supreme authority, Ex. 20:1ff.
 3. He dwells with us in blessing and judgment, Ex. 6:7, Rev. 21:3-4.
 4. Transcendence and immanence: The rectangular diagram.
 - C. Absolute personality
 1. Unique to biblical revelation.
 2. The impersonal reduces to the personal, not the other way around.

- III. God as an Object of Human Knowledge
 - A. God is incomprehensible (Isa. 55:8-9), but knowable (Rom. 1:21, John 17:3).

1. We don't know God exhaustively, or as he knows himself.
 2. But we do know him truly, on the basis of his revelation.
 3. Are human thoughts ever identical with God's (the "Clark controversy")?
 - a. We know many of the same things (objects) God knows, but not all.
 - b. But he knows as the creator, as the ultimate authority, as the one who *originates* knowledge. We know as creatures, as under authority, as the ones who *receive* knowledge.
- B. We know God as covenant Lord.
1. Knowing *about* God's Lordship: Ex. 14:18.
 - a. control
 - b. authority
 - c. presence in blessing and judgment
 2. Knowledge *subject to* God's Lordship
 - a. Control: God takes the initiative in revealing himself to us, Matt. 11:25-28.
 - b. Authority: Our knowledge should be a servant-knowledge, a knowledge in obedience. Interface of epistemology and ethics.
 - (i) Knowledge of God produces obedience, John 17:26, 14:15, 21, etc.
 - (ii) Obedience to God leads to knowledge, John 7:17.
 - (iii) Obedience is knowledge, and vice versa, Jer. 22:16, Hos. 6:6.
 - (iv) Obedience is the criterion of knowledge, Luke 8:21, John 8:47, 14:15, etc.
 - (v) Knowledge must be sought in an obedient way, 1 Cor. 1-2, 3:18-23, 8:1-3, Jas. 3:13-18.
 - (A) Submission to God's Word, Deut. 6:4ff, 1 Cor. 14:37, 2 Tim. 3:16-17.
 - (B) So, knowledge based on godly *presuppositions*.
 - (1) The most fundamental commitments of the heart.
 - (2) Therefore, the standards of certainty.
 - (C) Knowing in love, 1 Cor. 8:1-3.
 - c. Presence: Knowing God as a person.
 - (i) Knowledge of propositions, skills, persons.
 - (ii) Personal knowledge = loving, befriending.
 - (A) Figures of marriage, sonship, friendship.
 - (B) Knowledge in enmity.
- C. The Unbeliever's Knowledge of God, Rom. 1.
1. Knows, but hates, represses.
 2. A paradigm of irrationality.
 3. Rationalism and Irrationalism
 - a. Rationalism: The human mind is the ultimate criterion of truth.

- b. Irrationalism: there is no ultimate criterion of truth.
 - c. Epistemology in the Garden of Eden.
- IV. Knowing God's World
- A. Objects of Knowledge in the World
 - 1. God's Law (revelation): the norm of knowledge
 - a. The "subject-object" problem in secular philosophy.
 - (i) The subject is the knower; the object what he knows.
 - (ii) But how do we draw the line?
 - (A) Berkeley: all we know directly is the contents of our own consciousness, nothing beyond that. So there is no "object" beyond the subject itself.
 - (B) Hume: As we survey the contents of our consciousness, we find there only objects, no subject.
 - (iii) Answer: we need a *norm*.
 - (A) to distinguish subject and object.
 - (B) To distinguish truth from error.
 - b. The norm is God's revelation.
 - c. But in one sense everything is revelation.
 - (i) Special revelation (2 Tim. 3:16)
 - (ii) General revelation, all creation (Psm. 19, Rom. 1:18ff)
 - (iii) Existential revelation, ourselves as God's image (Gen. 1:27)
 - d. Special revelation has a unique importance.
 - (i) God's covenant document, the church's ultimate law, a written constitution.
 - (ii) So its teachings correct our faulty understanding of general revelation, our suppression of the truth. Calvin: the spectacles.
 - e. But special revelation is dependent on other forms of revelation.
 - (i) We need to know language, history, culture, etc. rightly to interpret the Bible.
 - (ii) We need to know the situations to which the Bible is to be applied.
 - (iii) We need to know ourselves: our maturity, intellectual and spiritual gifts, etc.
 - (iv) So in theological work, we never simply teach the Bible.
 - f. In a sense, then, everything is normative. But once we are convinced that the Bible teaches A, we must believe A, over against any other source of information.
 - 2. The world, our situation.
 - a. The world also includes everything: God's revelation, extra-biblical facts, and our own existence.
 - b. We know each of these by means of the others.
 - 3. Ourselves in God's image
 - a. We can't know ourselves without knowing God through his revelation (Calvin), but also vice versa.

- b. Self-knowledge includes knowledge of our environment, our situation.
 - c. Self-knowledge therefore includes knowledge of everything, for everything we know, we know through our own experience.
- B. Relationships Between Objects
 - 1. All three include everything, from different points of view.
 - 2. So each is a perspective on all reality.
 - 3. We need the law (revelation) to understand the world.
 - 4. We need the world to understand the law (above).
 - a. You don't understand Scripture if you can't apply it. Matt. 16:3, 22:29, Luke 24:25, John 5:39f, Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16f, 2 Pet. 1:19-21.
 - b. So understanding and applying Scripture are inseparable.
 - 5. We need the law to understand the self.
 - 6. We need the self to understand the law.
 - 7. We need the world (our environment) to understand the self.
 - 8. We need the self (our mind, heart) to understand the world. Facts and interpretations are inseparable.
- C. Epistemological Perspectives
 - 1. Normative: Understanding God's revelation in relation to the world and the self.
 - 2. Situational: Understanding the world in relation to God's revelation and to the self.
 - 3. Existential: Understanding oneself in the light of God's revelation and the world.

Justification of Knowledge

- I. The Question of Justification
 - A. Knowledge as "justified, true belief"
 - 1. Pertains to knowledge of propositions, not persons or skills.
 - 2. Therefore it pertains to the propositional aspects of the knowledge of God.
 - 3. Tri-perspectival.
 - B. Justification: a reason for believing.
 - 1. Important to theology, apologetics, preaching
 - 2. "Because," "therefore" in Scripture.
 - C. Implicit and explicit justification: having a reason vs. giving a reason.
- II. Forms of Justification
 - A. Normative: I believe p, because believing p is in accord with the norms for human thought. (Knowledge is ethical.)
 - B. Situational: I believe p, because this belief is in accord with the facts.
 - C. Existential: I believe p, because this belief is the most deeply satisfying.

- D. In a Christian world-view, these ought to lead to the same conclusions. God coordinates them.
- E. Indeed, each must incorporate the other two.
 1. The situational factor enters the definition of the normative: one rule of knowledge is that it be in accord with the facts.
 2. The existential factor enters the definition of the normative:
 - a. Knowledge is itself a subjective process.
 - b. Will and emotions are involved in knowledge.
 - c. We have a right to certainty only when subjective doubt is substantially removed.
 3. The normative factor is crucial to the situational: we know that we have “the facts” only when we are thinking rightly.
 4. The existential factor enters the definition of the situational:
 - a. Our subjective state is always a central fact of our experience.
 - b. We know the facts through our subjective “equipment.” If that equipment isn’t working right, we may not come to know the facts correctly.
 5. The normative factor enters the definition of the existential:
 - a. The rules of thought are one element in our subjectivity. We cannot rightly understand our subjectivity without taking the norm into account.
 - b. Once we recognize that norm as an element of our subjectivity, we recognize that it must govern all the other elements.
 6. The situational factor enters the definition of the existential:
 - a. The situation is the environment in which my subjectivity exists. So I can’t understand the latter apart from the former.
 - b. The situation is an element of my subjectivity. So we must take it into account in any self-understanding.

III. Secular Epistemologies

- A. Issue: what constitutes the ultimate ground of knowledge, the foundation?
- B. Traditional epistemologies
 1. Rationalism: reason is the foundation. Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz.
 - a. Begin with self-evident truths, build from there mainly by logical deduction.
 - b. Mathematical model.
 2. Empiricism: Sense experience is the foundation: Locke, Berkeley, Hume.
 3. Subjectivism: no objective truth, only “truth for me.” Sophists, Skeptics, Hume (to some extent), Existentialists, Postmodernists.
 4. Mixed views
 - a. Plato: rationalistic about the Forms, subjectivist about the sensory world.
 - b. Aristotle: rationalistic about Form, subjectivist about Matter, somewhat empiricist in methodology.

- c. Kant: subjectivist about the “world in itself,” rationalist about the “world as it appears to us,” empiricist in defining the limits of knowledge.
- 5. General evaluation:
 - a. Rationalism, empiricism, subjectivism correspond roughly to the normative, situational, and existential perspectives.
 - b. In secular thought, there is no God sufficient to coordinate the three perspectives.
 - c. Attempt to isolate one perspective as the ultimate ground of knowledge makes knowledge impossible.
 - d. One cannot be skeptical about one perspective while maintaining certainty about the others, when all perspectives are necessary to knowledge.

IV. Normative Justification

- A. God’s authority is the ultimate law of thought.
 - 1. Ultimate: higher than human logic, sense experience, etc.
 - 2. The normative includes all of God’s revelation; so in a sense everything is normative.
 - 3. But the Bible plays a special role in the hierarchy of norms.
 - (i) The covenant document, written by God’s own finger (Ex. 31:18).
 - (ii) Ultimate authority and sufficiency, Deut. 4:1-2, 6:4-9, Matt. 5:17-20, I Cor. 14:37, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:19-21.
 - (iii) Our settled convictions about what Scripture says take precedence over convictions derived from any other source.
 - 4. But of course the Bible must be interpreted in the light of other forms of revelation, and they must be interpreted in the light of the Bible.
- B. So God’s revelation becomes our *presupposition*.
 - 1. Our ultimate standard of truth.
 - 2. Our standard of certainty.
 - (i) The “cone:” we have different levels of theological certainty.
 - (ii) But the most fundamental biblical doctrines become our very criteria for all other certainties. “Let God be true, though every man a liar,” Rom. 3:4.
 - 3. Non-Christians have presuppositions too, Rom. 1. They view the evidence with hostility toward God, suppressing the truth.
- C. Justification for believing in revelation or Scripture.
 - 1. The ultimate standard (Scripture, revelation) must justify itself. It would be contradictory to try to justify an ultimate by something more ultimate.

2. This fact introduces a kind of circularity into the justification. However,
 - (i) All systems of thought are circular when they seek to defend their ultimate principle. Rationalists must appeal to reason, empiricists to sense-experience.
 - (ii) We should distinguish between narrowly and broadly circular arguments.
 - (A) Narrow: Scripture is God's Word, because it is God's Word.
 - (B) Broad: Scripture is God's Word, because it is logically consistent, is supported by this evidence, etc.
 - (1) Still circular, because Scripture is the final criterion for judging evidence, logic, etc.
 - (2) But more persuasive, because it exposes the hearer to more data, leading him into the riches of the biblical world-view.
3. Competing circularities (Christian vs. Muslim, etc.)
 - (i) Compare a psychiatrist's attempt to penetrate the circular world-view of a paranoid: not by accepting his world-view for a minute, but by presenting the truth.
 - (ii) The non-Christian knows at some level that the Christian world-view is true (Rom. 1).
 - (iii) Conversion to the Christian world-view is ultimately supernatural.
4. God is the source of the intelligibility of the universe and of human thought. We must stress that without God, there is no meaning, no intelligible communication.

V. Situational Justification

- A. Our situation is completely controlled by God, by decree (Psm. 33:11, Eph. 1:3-11), creation, and providence.
 1. Therefore it is all revelational (above).
 2. God's works display his name, the meaning of his Word.
 3. So every fact reveals him in some way.
 4. Facts cannot exist as facts apart from God.
- B. So understanding the facts of experience must be done in a way that is pleasing to God, governed by his Word.
- C. Given that, however, factual data ("evidence") play a major role in our quest for knowledge.
- D. No objection to theistic arguments, evidential reasoning, unless the apologist claims neutrality.
- E. We need extra-biblical facts in order to apply the Bible (see earlier).

VI. Existential Justification

- A. Role of the will and emotions in knowledge: we *choose* our beliefs (Rom. 1), based on our overall satisfaction with them.

1. This is not wrong; it is how God made us.
 2. The issue is not to eliminate the influence of emotions and will (as in Greek philosophy), but to have *godly* choices and feelings.
- B. Godly pragmatism: true beliefs must be beliefs we can live with.
- C. Persuasion: through many means, not only logic and fact. Some arguments may be logically valid, with factually true premises, but not persuasive. "If the Bible is true, God exists; the Bible is true, therefore God exists."
- D. Cognitive rest: How do I know when I have reached the end of an inquiry? Something very much like a *feeling*. For Christians, "a godly sense of satisfaction."
- E. Role of regeneration and sanctification.
1. The Spirit's role in knowledge: John 3, 1 Cor. 2:4ff, 1 Thess. 1:5.
 2. Necessary to remove our suppression of the truth.
 3. We must be willing to do his will in order to know, John 7:17.
 4. *Dokimazein*, Rom. 12:1-2, Eph. 5:8, Phil. 1:10, Heb. 5:11-14.
 5. "Seeing as:" gaining the ability to see facts in biblical terms.
 6. Corporate as well as individual.
 7. Biblical standards for teachers.

Method in Apologetics

- I. Normative
 - A. Always presuppose the truth of God's Word.
 - B. Identify the non-Christian's presuppositions, vs. his claim to neutrality.
 - C. Show his rationalism and irrationalism.
 - D. Show that he cannot account for meaning and truth.
- II. Situational
 - A. Present facts that confirm the Christian claims, always presupposing the Word of God.
 - B. Present facts that call in question non-Christian views.
- III. Existential
 - A. Present your arguments with clarity and appropriate passion.
 - B. Show that the Christian faith alone is ultimately satisfying.
 - C. Speak the truth in love.
 - D. Testify to God's grace in your own life.
 - E. Pray that the Spirit will bring the inquirer to faith.

Triads for Apologetics

John M. Frame

- I. Lordship Attributes
 - A. Control
 - B. Authority
 - C. Presence

- II. Knowledge
 - A. True
 - B. Justified
 - C. Belief

- III. Aspects of Knowledge
 - A. Object
 - B. Norm
 - C. Subject

- IV. Topics of Philosophy
 - A. Metaphysics
 - B. Epistemology
 - C. Values (including Ethics)

- V. Topics of Epistemology (Outline of DKG)
 - A. Objects
 - B. Justification
 - C. Methods

- VI. Uses of "Know"
 - A. Facts (knowing that)
 - B. Skills (knowing how)
 - C. Persons, things (knowing him, her, it)

- VII. Objects of Knowledge
 - A. World
 - B. God
 - C. Self (corporate or individual)

- VIII. Objects in the World
 - A. Nature and History
 - B. God's Revelation (law, norm)
 - C. The Self

- IX. Revelation
 - A. General

- B. Special
 - C. Existential
- X. Special Revelation
- A. Spoken
 - B. Written
 - C. Direct
- XI. Non-Christian Alternatives
- A. Empiricism
 - B. Rationalism
 - C. Subjectivism
- XII. Perspectives on Knowledge
- A. Situational (What are the facts?)
 - B. Normative (What am I obligated to acknowledge?)
 - C. Existential (With what understanding of the facts am I ultimately satisfied?)