

Introduction

I'd like to begin by giving you a little four-question quiz. Who were the Axis powers during World War II? Germany, Japan, and Italy. Who won the 1948 World Series? The Cleveland Indians. Which American president was assassinated on November 22, 1963? John F. Kennedy. Who was the first man to walk on the moon? Neil Armstrong.

Let me ask you something about the answer or answers you got right. Do you know or just believe them? How many of you, for instance, don't just believe that John F. Kennedy was assassinated but know he was - for sure? All of us do.

That question implies of course there's a difference between believing something and knowing it, and there is. But is the difference big enough that it matters? Isn't it enough to just believe, especially when it comes to spiritual things? Or do we really need to know? The text I read earlier, Hosea 4:1-6 tells us. We need to know what can be known and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Knowledge in General

Hosea was a prophet of God to the 10 northern tribes that made up the nation of Israel. Notice the words in verse 1, "**For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land.**" The Hebrew word translated case is a legal term that pictures God prosecuting a lawsuit against Israel. So let's examine what His "complaint" is about.

Look at the word "**knowledge**" in verses 1 and 6. That's what God's lawsuit against Israel is essentially about. It's that the leaders and people, on the whole, lacked "**knowledge.**" To understand the lawsuit, therefore, we have to understand what knowledge is.

The first line of verse 6, "**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge**" has a companion in this same chapter, the last line of verse 14, "**So the people without understanding are ruined.**" That line defines what knowledge is. It's understanding. It's the understanding or

awareness of what is so. We “know” when we think about things as they actually are. We grasp what is true or real in other words. Inherent in that knowledge of ours is the certainty that something is so.

I talked to a friend several weeks ago whose clutch was slipping. So he took his car to a mechanic who called later that day and said: “**I know what the problem is. Your throw-out bearing is bad.**” That mechanic had knowledge. He understood the reality of the car’s clutch system. He was certain that the throw-out bearing was bad.

Knowledge, as you can see, is different than belief. It is so in several ways. Beliefs may or may not be true. Knowledge is always true. Beliefs may or may not be based on evidence and experience. Knowledge is always based on evidence and experience. Beliefs are assumptions about what is so. Knowledge is certainty about what is so. I was with a hospital patient when his oncologist said: “**I believe you have cancer but won’t know for sure until I get the biopsy results back.**” His statement implied, and rightly so, that there’s a difference between knowledge and belief.

Knowledge of God and His Word

Now, the knowledge that God’s lawsuit against Israel involved was of a particular kind. Verse 1 – “**There is no knowledge of God in the land.**” Verse 6 – “**You have forgotten the law (written word) of your God.**” It was for lack of knowledge of Him and His word that God was suing Israel.

Notice a critical detail here. God’s lawsuit wasn’t about lack of *belief in* Him and His word. It was about lack of *knowledge of* Him and His word. That raises one of the most decisive issues in human life today. Dallas Willard reveals what that issue is in the form of a question in his newest book *Knowing Christ Today*. Listen very carefully to it: “**Are the central teachings of the Christian tradition things that can be known to be true if appropriately examined? Are they possible subjects of knowledge? Are there people who actually do**

know them to be true? Or are they things you can only *believe*?"

Let's identify several central teachings of Christianity, after each of which I'll ask you two questions. #1 - God exists and is personal, powerful, and intelligent. Do you believe that's true? Do you know it's true? #2 - The Bible is the written and infallible word of the God who exists. Do you believe that's true? Do know it's true? #3 - The God who exists raised Jesus from the dead. Do you believe that's true? Do you know it's true? And #4 - We can have on ongoing conversational relationship with the God who exists. Do you believe that's true? Do you know it's true?

According to the secular world and most of the Christian world, those things are matters of belief not knowledge. We cannot know them in the same way we know, for instance, that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. The best we can do is take a leap of faith and believe them.

Don't buy into that kind of thinking because it's absolutely false. The central teachings of Christianity are matters of knowledge, not just belief. Take the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Then take the fact that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I know the first just as much as I know the second. I'm just as certain of the first as I am of the second. What I'm saying is that the central teachings of Christianity are matters of knowledge, not just belief. We can *know* not just *believe* that the things of God and His word are true.

The Need to Know

But does it matter that we do? Isn't it enough just to believe those things are true? Or do we need to know they're true? We need to know and Hosea 4 explains why.

In legal complaints, the person prosecuting the lawsuit, the plaintiff, alleges behaviors or acts on the part of the defendant that constitute a cause of action. God does the same in verses 1-2. He alleges in verse 1 that the leaders and people were not truthful in their dealings with each other and unwilling to help those in need. He goes on to allege in

verse 2 that they took Him lightly, deceived, murdered, stole, and committed adultery. They also committed assault crimes against others. It's clear what verses 1 and 2 are - a scathing indictment of the way the Israelites conducted their lives.

But notice why they conducted their lives the way they did. It's because they lacked knowledge of God and His word. This text reveals one of the most vital causal connections of our existence. It's the one between knowledge and conduct of life. Probably more than anything else does, knowledge conditions what we decide and do. Let me quote Dallas Willard again who explains it far better than I can: "**Knowledge, but not mere belief or commitment . . . confers on its possessor an authority or right – even a responsibility – to act, to direct action . . . and to teach.**" I've preached before that our beliefs condition what we decide and do. But they don't condition that to nearly the extent and degree that knowledge does. As Willard points out, *knowing*, with its certainty, confers on us an authority and responsibility that *believing*, with its lack of certainty, doesn't. Knowledge deepens our commitment to both *act* and *witness* in a way that belief doesn't.

Take something I've told you many times before as an example of what I mean, "**The Bible contains the best information about the most important matters in human life.**" Please understand. I don't just believe that's true. I know it's true. I'm as certain of that as I am that the Axis powers during World War II were Germany, Japan, and Italy. Knowing that fact about the Bible profoundly affects two things.

One is the way I act. I want to live well. So I spend a significant amount of time studying the Bible in order to get the best information about how to do that. Then, once I get it, I commit myself to living by it. I don't gossip, for example, because the Bible tells me not to. I know, not just believe, that it's best not to and so, don't.

Knowing that fact about the Bible profoundly affects a second thing. It's the way I witness. Suppose you're going to college and I know you can get a \$10,000 grant by just applying for it. What I know would

greatly benefit you. So, I tell you about it. I'd be irresponsible if I didn't. It's the same with this fact I know about the Bible. What I know would greatly benefit others. So I tell them about it. I'd be irresponsible if I didn't. I have two acquaintances who are third generation unbelievers, one a psychologist. This fact I know about the Bible would greatly benefit them. So, I told them about it. I'd have been irresponsible if I hadn't.

You can see it. Knowing that the central teachings of Christianity are true confers on us a right and responsibility to act and witness that simply believing they're true doesn't. Those who know and believe usually act more committedly and witness more devotedly than those who only believe. We need to know!

How to Know

We need to know and we can. Knowing isn't only the domain of the intellectually elite. It's the domain of ordinary thinkers like you and me as well. If we want to know, we can and here's how.

Consider how I know that the Cleveland Indians won the 1948 World Series. I have seen several film clips of that Series, have come across a 1948 newspaper the headlines of which proclaimed it, have read articles by reliable sports writers, and have talked with two people, both of whom actually attended the sixth and final game and said that Cleveland won. That illustrates how we come to know.

First, we gather facts. We have two sources for doing so – evidence and experience. Evidence refers to realities that demonstrate the truth or existence of something, like the film clips I saw and the 1948 newspaper I came across. Experience refers to something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through, like the two people actually attending the sixth game. Anyway, the first thing we do is gather facts from evidence and experience.

Second, we use good logic to draw the right conclusions from the facts. I explained in a sermon last year how to do that. Using the

logical relations of implication and contradiction, we figure out, based on the facts, what must be true or real and what must not be. Whether we realize it or not, you and I do this all the time, either correctly or incorrectly. Applying good logic to the facts I've gathered, I can come to only one conclusion. The Cleveland Indians won the 1948 World Series.

So that's how we come to know. It's what some people call "doing the math." We gather facts from evidence and experience and then use good logic to draw the right conclusions from them. It takes time, thought, and effort to do that but it works when we do it. We come to know things – including the central teachings of Christianity.

The resurrection of Jesus is a classic example of what I mean. We need to do the math. We need to gather the facts from evidence and experience and then use good logic to draw the right conclusions from them. We'll discover this if we do. The only plausible explanation of the facts is that Jesus did in reality rise from the dead. Take just four of many facts. #1 – the disciples claimed they walked and talked with Jesus after He died. #2 – they would know if that claim were false. #3 - they died for that claim. #4 – sane people don't die for claims they know to be false. And #5 – the disciples were sane people. Applying good logic to those facts, the only reasonable conclusion is that they walked and talked with Jesus after He died.

What we do with the resurrection of Jesus, we need to do with all the central teachings of Christianity. We need to do the math. We'll know those teachings, not just believe them, if we do. I'll be teaching a Sunday school class about that, doing the math, beginning in March.

Conclusion

I close with verses 3-5, which picture the consequences of Israel's lack of knowledge. It's destruction. They make clear, contrary to the old axiom, that what we don't know will hurt us. They also make clear that what we do know will help us. So, let's not just believe but know that the things of God and His word are true. We have the need to know!