

Scientific Knowledge Versus Other Forms of Knowledge

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • March 10, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2024

Scripture Reader and Reading: Jim Rich – First Corinthians 8.1–3

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Nash Crisp – Anything promoting knowledge of God and His word

Persuasion:

I. The Blessings of Scientific and Technical Knowledge

We today know exponentially more about the universe than any generation before us. Burgeoning scientific knowledge and technical know-how have enabled us to eradicate diseases, explore outer space, build skyscrapers, squeeze nearly infinite data into infinitesimal spaces, conquer the farthest distances with instantaneous communications, and achieve prosperity beyond the wildest dreams of our ancestors. We who live in the twenty-first-century can congratulate ourselves on the success of the great project that Francis Bacon recommended to the human race at the beginning of the Scientific Revolution: “the mastery of nature for the relief of man’s estate.”

– “And Rightly So,” April 21, 2008 by Elizabeth Kantor, editor-in-chief of *Conservative Book Club*

A. Who has not benefited from

B. modern science and the amazing progress of technology?

1. Looking back at the advancements of science in the twentieth century,
2. we wonder what the twenty-first century promises.
 - a) What do you think will happen during this century or
 - b) what have you heard will be advances for the twenty-first century?
3. Our scientific and technological advances testify to the truth of Genesis,

6 And the LORD said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.”

– **Genesis 11.6**

a) Walt Disney said,

If you can dream it, you can do it.

b) It seems he was right.

II. Scientific Knowledge Does Not Trump All Other Knowledge

But just because our science has harnessed physical nature for our health, profit, and pleasure, does it necessarily follow that twenty-first-century people know more about *everything else* than our scientifically primitive ancestors did? More about law and liberty than the eighteenth-century heroes who framed our Constitution? More about human nature than the medieval geniuses who used the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle to arrive at a deeper understanding of Christian Revelation? More about marriage and sexual morality than the Apostle Paul?

A. First, we often overrate our advances,

1. believing that ancient people
2. did not do what we have done.

a) A non-creation book, *Ancient Inventions*, says on the front cover,

From Greek steam engines to Roman fire engines...Aztec chewing gum to Etruscan false teeth...earthquake detectors in China to electric batteries in Iraq...Stone Age brain surgery to Middle Age hand grenades...the Pharaohs' canals to the Cretans' lavatories...here's a lively and fascinating look at the genuine Wonders of the Past!

b) The back cover says,

A popular misconception exists that the builders of the pyramids or the cave painters of prehistory were somehow less intelligent than we are. This simply isn't true: there is no evidence that the human brain has evolved at all in the last fifty thousand years, at least. Modern people are merely benefiting from thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and experimentation, not from increased intellect...The scientific exploration of oceans and space presses on, but we also have much to learn from the exploration of ancient science and technology—the goal of such exploration is unimaginably rich.

- c) If the authors (Peter James and Nick Thorpe) would say that
- (1) with an evolutionary background,
 - (2) what should we say with a creation background?
 - (a) What would our creation background say?
 - (b) Creation says that the first man had
 - (c) the full intelligence that we have.
 - i) He was not sub-human, but
 - (1) as much human as we are and
 - (2) we are as much human as he was.
 - ii) This is true of all people everywhere in the world today.
 - (1) If we have greater science and technology,
 - (2) it is only because we have built on the work of others.
 - (a) Therefore, it does not surprise us to read of ancient peoples having
 - (b) steam engines, fire engines, chewing gum, false teeth, earthquake detectors, electric batteries, brain surgery, hand grenades, and wonderful building projects that we call the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
 - (3) Isaac Newton said:

“If I have seen further [than others], it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”
3. [Sometime this year, Lord willing, I will do sermons on the genius of ancient man with an emphasis upon ancient Egypt]
- B. Scientific knowledge is good.
- C. Of all knowledge, Solomon wrote,

**14 Wise people store up knowledge,
But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.**

– **Proverbs 10.14**

- 2 Also it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge,
And he sins who hastens with his feet.**

– **Proverbs 19.2**

D. However, we have to lay the proper foundation for knowledge

1. that we might learn to keep all things in perspective,
2. keeping us from sinning with our knowledge:

- 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

– **Proverbs 1.7**

E. Second Corinthians 8 shows that knowledge is not the greatest thing there is.

1. As magnificent as scientific and technological knowledge have become,
2. they are not everything and
 - a) they do not surpass other forms of knowledge.

1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

– **1 Corinthians 8.1–3**

- (1) Knowledge is good, but
 - (2) love is better.
- b) What is the problem of knowledge alone?
- (1) It leads to arrogance.
 - (2) Giving an undue exaltation to scientific knowledge

- (a) leads to the belief
- (b) that it is greater than all other forms of knowledge.
 - i) As Solomon said:

**18 Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.**

– Proverbs 16.18

- ii) Therefore, let science and technology be balanced
 - (1) with other forms of knowledge and
 - (2) with love.

III. Scientific Knowledge Can Breed Arrogance

Pretty obviously not. Our ever-increasing mastery of physical nature sometimes gives people (especially on the Left, but all of us are susceptible to the illusion) the impression of unstoppable progress in all our affairs. But in the knowledge and management of human things (as opposed to merely physical ones), every real improvement seems to be balanced by a corresponding loss. We outlawed slavery in the nineteenth century only to legalize abortion in the twentieth. The last century saw the rise of popular democracies blessed by the rule of law—and of the bloodiest tyrannies history has ever seen.

A. First Timothy 6.20 warns:

20 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—

– 1 Timothy 6.20

1. The Old King James Version has “science” in place of “knowledge.”
2. What did Paul warn against?
 - a) Since the gospel had been committed to Timothy’s trust,
 - b) he had to guard it.

3. Guarding it included avoiding
 - a) the profane,
 - b) idle babblings, and
 - c) contradictions of
 - (1) a system of thought erroneously called "knowledge."
 - (2) In the case of scientific and technological knowledge,
 - (a) the claim to knowledge in one area,
 - (b) does not mean they have all the answers in other areas.
 - i) Advancement in one field
 - ii) does not guarantee advancement in another.
- B. We have made great strides in some aspects of modern living, but,
 1. as Elizabeth Kantor argued,
 2. we have lost ground in other areas of modern life.
 - a) We have learned how to save and extend lives, but
 - b) we kill the unborn.
 - (1) Is then modern society truly better than past societies?
 - (2) How do you judge a culture?

IV. Science Grows, But Other Knowledge Deteriorates

Why do our science and technology advance while our morality and politics stagnate, and even deteriorate?

- A. How do you answer that question?
- B. To most people,
 1. the science and technology appear to be objective, but
 2. morality and politics appear to be subjective.
 - a) So, what does that mean exactly?

- (1) They see morality as open to interpretation, but
- (2) the science as not open to interpretation.

C. The world is fleshly and materialistic,

1. whereas matters of morality and politics
2. require true spirituality.

D. We believe falsely

1. that the Constitution allows any form of morality and
2. any form of government.
 - a) Along with that, we believe
 - b) that the Constitution is the supreme law of the universe,
 - (1) believing that the Bible
 - (2) is subservient to it.

E. All of these things together

1. cause us to be man- or self-directed
2. rather than God-directed.
 - a) We seek our own glory
 - b) rather than the glory of God.

V. Past Science Makes Modern Science Possible

Seeing farther because you stand on the shoulders of giants (Isaac Newton's recipe for progress in science) only works if you take the trouble to climb up to that higher vantage point. Scientists and engineers have been building cumulatively on the work of their predecessors since the days of Bacon and Newton. Too many philosophers, moralists, and social scientists over the same period have invested their energies in destroying the wisdom of the past rather than building on it.

A. For the most part, the scientists of the past have been believers in God.

B. However, how society prosper when it denigrates past believers in God?

VI. Many Philosophers Bring Us Down

Machiavelli ignored out of existence the whole of philosophy on justice in government, advising his Prince only on how to get and keep power. Hobbes replaced the Biblical account of man's creation and fall with a destructive fiction about a prehistoric "state of nature"; Rousseau substituted belief in original goodness for the doctrine of original sin and inspired the French Revolution. Margaret Mead imagined a perfectly natural society free of the tired old sexual conventions; Kinsey sold America on a sexual ethic—or rather, the abolition of all sexual ethics—based on (fraudulent) science instead of on any traditional morality or religion.

A. There are good things in philosophy, but

1. never forget the warning of Colossians 2:

6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

– Colossians 2.6–10

B. According to verses 6 and 7,

1. how are we rooted, built up, and established in life?
2. It is by receiving Christ Jesus the Lord in faith.
 - a) In him, we find our root and source for being built up.
 - b) By faith in him, we establish ourselves.

C. Therefore, beware of thinking that deprives you of faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Paul warned that philosophy can do that very thing, especially
2. when it follows the tradition of men and the basic principles of the world.

D. What reason does Paul give in verses 9 and 10

1. for arguing that our completeness comes through Christ and
2. not through man's philosophy?
 - a) In *Jesus* dwells all the fullness of the Godhead.
 - b) Therefore, we can be complete in him.
3. We do not need the teachings of worldliness.

VII. Attacking the Giants of Yesterday

Sadly, too much of our recent intellectual heritage isn't much more than slings and arrows aimed at the giants of our previous intellectual heritage.

- A. This is one way to judge what you hear.
- B. Who is the person attacking and why?
- C. We do not have to agree with everything
 1. of past intellectual and spiritual giants, but
 2. we should thank God for them, because
 - a) through them God has made our lives better,

1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

– 1 Timothy 2.1–2

- b) This includes both the scientists and
- c) technicians of today and yesterday,
 - (1) as well as politicians, preachers, and philosophers of today and yesterday
 - (2) who held up the light of truth.