

# DEFEATING IGNORANCE

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Human beings come to know things through their senses. The things we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch leave impressions in our minds which we process into knowledge. The information that we gain through reading (whether it is printed material or from a screen) comes into our minds through our senses. There is then a sense in which we are all sponges, soaking up the raw materials of knowledge all our waking hours.

There is a problem with this process, however. We can be fooled on two levels. First, we can be mistaken about the sensory input we take in. We have all had the experience of being incorrect about something we thought we saw or heard. In addition, we can process the information badly. This happens when we fail to think correctly, as when we allow emotion to overrule reason.

I mention these things because of the problem of ignorance. Ignorance is the state of affairs wherein people believe false things to be true. Ignorance results from being wrong about the facts associated with a matter (the aforementioned incorrect processing of raw information) coupled with faulty thinking making use of this bad information. Ignorance is the partnership of factual error and the absence of logic.

We wish to avoid the problem of ignorance, don't we? The first step is to be sure about the raw materials of knowledge that we take in. This ranges from things like the carpenter's simple but profound rule of "measure twice, cut once" to understanding the perspective of the folks that teach us, give us the "news" and preach to us. Consider the classroom. If I were studying history in college I would want to know where my teacher is coming from. If he is a Marxist historian who believes in economic determinism, I want to know that. I can still learn from such a person, but I need to know how the teacher looks at the world. It is the same with watching the "news" on TV. What are the preconceived notions of the speaker or writer? I cannot properly process the information they provide without knowing if perhaps there is an agenda at work. As I tell my students, always ask this key question: "Where is the writer (Speaker, Teacher, or Preacher) coming from?" In other words, consider the source.

As you may have noticed, this is nothing more than careful common sense. But many folks fail to apply it and become dupes of those who set out to practice deception or those who have been themselves fully deceived. These principles have application (as I have mentioned) in all manner of public discourse, including the classroom, politics and the media.

Nowhere is this more important than in religion. God has provided in the Bible all we need in order to know the truth about our spiritual lives (John 17:17, 2 Peter 1:3). The Bible is the (not "a", but "the") repository of revealed and specific truth about how to live the life of faith (Romans 10:17). God teaches us how to think in two ways. First, the world around us is testimony to rational process. Things work a specific way. Gravity is what it is, not whatever somebody wants it to be. That's the way thought is to be, logical and rational. Second, He provided in the Bible examples of people thinking as He wants us to think. Romans 1:18-32 is a perfect example of God using nature and the Biblical text to show us how to think.

Now, here is the point. When you think about your spiritual life, remember to examine both the source of the information you are thinking about and the way you are thinking about it. Are you getting your information from a televangelist who is also asking for money (or some sweet little devotional book designed to make you feel good and buy more books)? Or are you getting your information from a careful contextually aware study of the Bible? It makes a difference. Are you thinking with your heart (by this I mean emotions) or your mind? It makes a difference. And what difference is that? It is simply the difference between right and wrong. Consider the source and think carefully (John 8:32).