

# Worldview Epistemology

## INTRODUCTION

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known...The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding...The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

1 Corinthians 13:12; Proverbs 1:7, 3:5; Psalm 19:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

## DEFINITION AND CHALLENGES

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. The word comes from the Greek words “episteme,” which means “knowledge,” and the suffix “-ology” which means “the study of.” But this definition is lacking for us because this field of study is very broad.

The study of epistemology spans multiple dimensions of human experience (reason, perception, faith), intersects with various disciplines (philosophy, theology, science), and addresses both theoretical and practical questions about truth and belief. Because of this, epistemology can seem abstract or too academic for many, especially without a framework or a practical application.

In this lesson, we are going to simplify the concept and demonstrate that it is the Biblical Framework that gives us what we need for understanding.

## QUESTIONS PART 1

Those who study Epistemology generally ask a few common questions:

- How much do we know?
- How much can we know?
- What are the methods of gaining knowledge?
- Are some things unknowable?

These questions are theoretical and without an ultimate source. We are left to debate and speculate. But if we have a true source of authority in respect to knowledge, then we have somewhere to go and ask our questions, confident that the answers are available.

## HOW DO WE KNOW?

Knowledge is a result of a process, even if the process is unseen. Many are insistent that Epistemology is the study of knowledge and justification. In the secular world, this is usually broken down into the following.

- **Empiricism:** Knowledge comes primarily through sensory experience (e.g., observation, experiments).
- **Rationalism:** Knowledge is derived through reason and innate ideas.

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- **Constructivism:** Knowledge is constructed through interactions, experience, and cognitive processes
- **Pragmatism:** Knowledge is tied to practical consequences and utility.
- **Testimony:** Knowledge gained from others' accounts or authority.

All these theories are actually saying how belief is justified.

**Empiricism** – Belief is justified through repeated sensory experiences or experiments.

**Rationalism** – Belief is justified through logical analysis, aligning it with principles or innate truths

**Constructivism** – Belief is justified through new experiences or information into their existing cognitive framework.

**Pragmatism** – Belief is justified through actions and experiences when it yields practical results.

**Testimony** – Belief is justified through evaluating a source's reliability, expertise, or consistency.

## INFILTRATION INTO CHRISTENDOM

**Empiricism**, which prioritizes knowledge gained through observation and sensory experience, entered Christendom prominently during the Enlightenment. God uses empirical observation to demonstrate truth, but human experience and observation fall short.

Why? Because human experience and observation are limited to space and time. We are looking inside the box without being able to observe and experience all that is in the box.

**Rationalism**, emphasizing reason and logical deduction, also gained influence during the enlightenment. This is a blend of logic and theology, but most have Scripture yield to rationalism rather than using rational thought to understand the truth. Those who subject the truth of God to rationalism fall short.

Why? Because it depends on limited human thoughts and is prone to sinful rebellion.

**Constructivism**, which views knowledge as actively constructed through personal and social experiences, entered Christendom through modern and postmodern influences, particularly in liberal and progressive theology. People's views on God and truth are constantly being "constructed" through personal experiences and social values.

Movements emphasizing personal spiritual experiences prioritize subjective "encounters" over scriptural authority, constructing doctrine based on feelings or visions.

**Pragmatism**, which ties knowledge to practical success, infiltrated Christendom through American evangelicalism and revivalism of the 1800s and 1900s. This adopted Christianity as "what works," emphasizing measurable outcomes (church growth, social impact, etc.).

We see this in the large evangelical churches with production and marketing in order to attract and hold on to attendance in churches.

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**Testimony**, which proports to justify belief through trusted sources, sounds similar to what we should do. But this is not about the true testimony but rather human testimony apart from God's influence. This is seen in Christendom through the veneration of Tradition or specific teachers.

We see this in Catholicism, Orthodoxy, reliance on parents, teachers, pastors, authors, and theologians as the source for truth or equivalent to the Scriptures.

## THE TRUE EPISTEMOLOGY

The biblical model for epistemology is called revelation. We need to be outside of creation and observe and experience everything in the creation to know what is true.

The Bible itself tells us how we know what we know.

1. Belief that the biblical God exists, and that He has revealed Himself (Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, 9:10).
  - a. General revelation – in creation (Genesis 1 and Romans 1)
  - b. Special revelation – The biblical text (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
2. Sufficiency
  - a. General revelation is sufficient for all to have the knowledge of His invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature (Rom 1:20).
  - b. God's special revelation (the Bible) provides what is necessary for the believer to know God, see His plan, and understand what God wants from man. Truth and reality are found in Scripture; it has provision for unbelievers to become believers, and for equipping believers for a God honoring life.

In the biblical model, God is the source of authority, and our worldview inquiry seeks to understand Him through His revelation in Scripture. We can know God, but it is God who reveals Himself to us.

The second key question addressed in epistemology is how to interpret that source of authority.