

# CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

## *Chapter 11*

### Science, the Bible and the Early Church

This past week I had the blessing of getting to spend a day at Wheaton College. I gave a public lecture, which was all well and good, but my personal highlight of the day came from teaching a class of Dr. Jerry Root. The class is an elective dealing with evangelism and modern culture. Basically, it is a class in teaching and working with students on sharing their faith.

Over forty students are in the class, and each is serious about bringing others to Christ. It was stunning to look out over the class and see star football players, music majors, art majors, business majors and more, all working to share the love of Jesus with their classmates and the world.

I was excited to teach the class for a number of reasons, starting with what I would get out of it! Here is what I wanted (and got). I handed out to all students a half sheet of paper. I told them that I clearly did not know them. I didn't know their parents or friends, and I certainly didn't know their handwriting. So what they were about to write and submit to me would be totally and truly anonymous.

Assured of that anonymity, I asked them to each do a bit of soul searching and write an answer to the question I placed on the board:

What is your biggest personal challenge to having faith in God?

I wanted to know what they struggled with in assessing and living with their own faith. I collected them, and with the time we had, began going through them discussing each one as we had the time.

The answers intrigued me. They showed a level of thought and focus that came from careful self-examination. I was honored they took the assignment I gave seriously, and that I had the chance to address their concerns.

Not surprisingly, a number of the students were concerned over issues of science and the Bible. This has been an area of concern for many over the centuries. There were those in the renaissance, for example, who believed the Bible taught that the earth was stationary while the sun moved around it ("geocentrism"). This was based on passages like Ecclesiastes 1:5,

The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.

The idea of the sun “standing still” (Josh. 10:12-13) was the exception, not the principle! In high school we learned of the problems that arose for Galileo Galilei when he championed the belief that the earth rotated around the sun (“heliocentrism”).

Of course, many have always read and understood these passages as speaking into the language and structure of the time and place of authorship, rather than a scientific dissertation on the interaction between earth and heaven. Galileo himself was not a pagan, but rather a very devout believer in God and Scripture.

I suggested to the students that we are in an age where we understand the universe, the laws of nature, and science better than at likely any time in history. Rather than challenge our faith and understanding of Scripture, it should infuse it with greater meaning. Just as the church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century began to better see the beauty of the Bible’s language as it spoke of the sun rising and setting, so we can learn as well. The example I gave the students was from Romans 1:20, where Paul said that God’s invisible attributes and nature are clearly perceived in the world he has made. I asked the students, “What does two plus two equal?” The answer was unanimous, “Four.” I asked what the answer was if I had asked the question the day before. Again they answered “four.” I asked if any were worried that the following day the answer might change. None were. This is God. He is consistent in nature, unchanging, reliable. He is constant, pure truth. We don’t have to worry that tomorrow he becomes something he isn’t today. His reliability is on display in the law of nature he set up. This is no magic universe where one day gravity pulls things skyward.

Truth is God’s truth, whether it is found in math, science, or philosophy. This bedrock assurance is what has enabled the church to grow in understanding. The church better learns not just God’s revelation but even about God himself (“theology”). Certainly there are times when using something outside of the Bible in the name of instilling Biblical truths can be troublesome. We must be careful not to sacrifice God’s truth at the altar of some transient “knowledge.” This issue has been with the church since long before Galileo Galilei! We see that in this lesson as we consider the early church disputes over Jewish and Greek thoughts.

To best understand the controversy, we need to review some basics we have already covered to some degree. This is necessary to put the discussion into context and also serves as a review/refresher.

## JEWISH ROOTS OF THE CHURCH

Our earliest church history comes from the New Testament itself, especially the history book we call “Acts.” We know the church’s Jewish roots. It was through the Jewish lineage that Jesus Christ was incarnated. Christ’s ministry, as reported in the gospels, centered on outreach and ministry mainly to the Jews. Christ’s apostles were all Jewish as well.

We see that Jesus clued his apostles to the fact that the church would be larger than Judaism when Jesus told his apostles that they were to go into the whole world and preach the good news to all nations (Mt. 28:19-20). We must not think that this was a directive to take the church only to the Jews that were dispersed throughout the world, living in many nations, and speaking many tongues. Matthew uses the term “*ethnos*” (ἔθνος), which means “Gentiles” or non-Jewish people groups.

We see this unfolding in Acts. First, the Spirit came upon the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 2). Those Jews took their faith in the crucified and resurrected Savior to their homes in Jerusalem and beyond. Thus, the church was born. The church started as a movement within Judaism, but quickly grew beyond that boundary.

Peter took the gospel to Cornelius after a vision where God made it apparent that the gift of atonement in Christ is for more than God’s chosen people, the Jews (Acts 10-11). Still, we find that the church largely operated within the confines of its Jewish roots.

Enter into this picture Paul, a man fully Jewish, yet uniquely fashioned by his life and education to communicate to Greeks. Scripture introduces Paul at a time when he is zealously living his Pharisaic life of rules and diligence, protecting his understanding of God’s place on earth by rooting out and destroying the infectious Christian disease that is growing in Judaism. While going to Damascus to confront and arrest Christians within Judaism, the risen Christ confronts Paul himself (Acts 9). The church’s history then takes a drastic and surprising turn.

Instead of purifying his Jewish people by destroying the faith in Christ, Paul began truly purifying his Jewish people by proclaiming the faith of Christ. Paul brought not Pharisaic doctrinal purity, but true purity of soul with the saving faith that is the bedrock of the church.

Paul took the gifts and teaching God had worked into his personal history and began something unheard of in history – the mission trip!<sup>1</sup> Unlike most of his predecessors, Paul went out into the Greek world to teach and proclaim faith in a risen Lord. Taking his Old Testament as scripture, Paul moved through Asia Minor, into Greece, and at least into Italy as well, spreading faith in Christ and concurrently spreading the church.

While Paul’s efforts were in the Greek world, Paul still primarily taught those versed in and affiliated with the Old Testament and Judaism. Most of the Greeks he converted were those who attended the Jewish synagogue as “God fearers.”<sup>2</sup> The teachings of Christ and the basics of Christian life were delivered to those who already had a healthy respect for Jewish scripture and Jewish thought. In fact, when Paul is on trial, the Jewish prosecutors accuse him of belonging to a “sect,” using the same word for Christianity that was used to describe the sect of Pharisees or Sadducees, as if Christianity was simply a form of Judaism.<sup>3</sup>

### **DISTANCE FROM JUDAISM**

The majority of our New Testament, and certainly Acts itself, covers a time period up through the early 60’sAD. As noted above, this is a distinctly Jewish time period for the church. In the late 60’s and early 70’s, world events took a turn that profoundly affected the church. The Jews in Jerusalem rebelled against the Roman authorities. The rebellion was bloody with many men, women, and children dying. Among the Jews that died for their independence, history does not record Christians among their number. Early church historians explained that Christians left Jerusalem and did not take arms with their Jewish kinsmen. In fact, most modern historians agree that the early Christians were pacifists. For them, the teachings of Christ to turn the other cheek, to submit to authorities, to refrain from hatred and murder, as well as the example of a submissive Christ who had authority and resources to turn the Roman empire upside down, led them to chose submission and pacifism that led to Calvary and crucifixion.

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<sup>1</sup> By and large, earlier historic efforts to go into the world and convert someone to a religion was never much more than the forced conversion that might come with a military conquest.

<sup>2</sup> Acts tells us also of Paul approaching Greeks unaffiliated with Judaism in Athens. Similarly, we can assume that Acts tells us only that information that Luke thought it important to write, but we must remember that it is not a full accounting of all that Paul or the other early witnesses achieved in their missionary efforts. In other words, simply because something is not said, we cannot assume it was not done!

<sup>3</sup> Tertullus accuses Paul of being a “ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes,” using the word “*heiresis*” (εἵρεσις), which is translated “sect.” (See also Acts 24:14). The same word is used for the party of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5) as well as Sadducees (Acts 5:17).

Scholars debate the full results of the departure of Christians from the Jewish rebellions (a second occurred in 132-135AD), but it makes sense and seems consistent with the historical record to note that it caused great consternation among the Jewish power structure that survived the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the rebellion. Judaism regrouped and tried to find a national identity and religious foundation outside of the Jerusalem Temple and its leaders. The new phase of Jewish history centered on synagogues outside of Jerusalem. Because sacrifices were to be offered only upon the holy altar of the Temple and by the Temple priests, those sacrifices were stopped until the Temple might be restored. Jews found their faith and practice in a dispersion. Without the unity that came from a united practice in Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders needed to clearly delineate what was and was not tolerated in the dispersed Jewish faith.

Some historical sources indicate that there was a meeting of surviving rabbis at Jamnia, a Mediterranean coastal town (modern Jebna), about 85AD. These sources credit the surviving Jewish leaders for rewriting much of Jewish daily practice to work outside the Temple system. In the process, the Jewish benedictions were rewritten. The rewritten benedictions specifically excluded those adherents of Christianity from the Jewish synagogues and life.

During this time, the church experienced profound changes. What had started as a renewal movement in Judaism found itself excluded from that faith and its worship. This resulted in a church founded on faith in a Jewish Savior, which used the Jewish scriptures, led by Jewish leaders, a number of whom came from the Jewish intelligentsia, with a natural breeding ground of further converts from those attending Jewish synagogues. Once that church was made anathema to faithful Jews, it naturally put the church on a road that turned decidedly Greek.

What did the new road mean? The church found new believers and a new generation of faithful not as conversant with the Old Testament scriptures, and who did not have a thorough understanding of the Jewish culture and traditions that explained and underscored the life of Christ and the gospels themselves. The new church leaders for the next generation were not the thought leaders and intelligentsia of Judaism. Instead, they were Greek educated, philosophy-minded gentiles with a decidedly non-Jewish bent!

Many think of the Greek thought of the day as if it mattered mostly in philosophy. If we do so, however, we sell Greek influence short. Greek thought was not simply what we today consider “philosophy,” unless we consider that word as it held its original meaning. Aristotle wrote on logic and physics. Pythagorus wrote on math. The theory of the atom was developed in classical Greece. Greek thought, including what we today term “philosophy” was the science of its day.

The word “philosophy” comes from two Greek words, *philos* (φίλος) meaning “friend” and *Sophos* (σοφός) meaning wisdom. Many of our modern science departments arose historically from departments of “philosophy.”

As we look then at the Greek turn of the church, we find a number of church leaders and thinkers who understood Greek concepts as their modern science. Much of that thought was “truth,” and it simply needed to be integrated into Scripture and the teaching of the apostles. With that, however, came tensions among those who held to more Jewish thought forms.

At this point, we enter the second and third centuries with the tensions and controversies covered in this lesson. The writers we have already covered in this class included some intellectual Greek giants who wrote effective defenses of the faith not only on legal and moral grounds, but also from an academic angle, explaining the intellectual integrity behind the Christian’s faith. Many of these writers were actually Greek philosophers who came to embrace the faith in Christ as the logical answer to their philosophical questions. Among the greatest of these thinkers/teachers/writers was Clement of Alexandria, whom we covered in an earlier class that looked at his allegorical approach to understanding scripture.

It is quite understandable that these Greek thinkers would write about their faith in ways that used Greek thought over that of the Jews, even though Jews were the authors of the New Testament. The Greek-based teachings themselves were, of course, by and large integrated with the New Testament scriptures, which as we have shown the church saw as authoritative, apostolic writings. However, the understanding and writing about these scriptures was often in very “Greek” terminology. This also came at a time when the church was trying to understand some issues that were not set forth clearly in scripture itself.

A prime example is Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-c.202), whom we studied in our lessons on Gnosticism example, and his position on the central Christian issue of the church – the salvation Jesus brings to humanity. We have seen that Irenaeus stood firm in his teachings against heresies of his day, but he did so in logical Greek fashion. In the process of explaining the deviations of Gnostic heresy, Irenaeus set out the true salvation wrought by Christ, as he understood it. For Irenaeus, Christ brought salvation to the race of Adam through what theologians call “recapitulation.”<sup>4</sup> (The word itself is not that useful, so you can safely tuck it away for a bit and try for the thought behind it instead!)

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<sup>4</sup> The doctrine is so named because of its reliance upon Ephesians 1:9-10 that reads that the mystery of God’s will was “set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” The Greek for “to unite” is *anakephalaioo* (ἀνακεφαλαιόω). The prefix *ana-* is equivalent to the Latin prefix *re-*, as in “again.” The Greek

Irenaeus taught, somewhat as an extension of Romans 5, that Adam's sin automatically affected all people because Adam was the progenitor of all humanity. The problem as Irenaeus saw it was more than Christ having to get a human's soul back into the hands of God for eternity. The problem was a material, flesh, and blood science problem! How could a child of Adam made of flesh and blood have eternity with God? Irenaeus understood Jesus solved this problem as God incarnate – that is, God made flesh. By Jesus being born an infant, taking up the material substance that was the substance of Adam, Jesus brought a salvation to that substance. Jesus was not merely a heavenly sacrifice for sin, but was made king of the material creation by taking material substance and redeeming it through his life and death. In every aspect of flesh and blood, Jesus reversed the failings and shortcomings of Adam. So in Christ, we have a true joining of heaven and earth – a new Adam – a new progenitor of a new race. The Christian's renewal is not only a spiritual one of grace, but also a material one that will find a resurrection of flesh and blood.

While those distinctions may seem overly complicated to us, they rooted out the Gnosticism of Irenaeus's day, and became central to some of the church's thought as the church grew to wrestle with what it meant for Christ to be fully divine and yet fully human.

We also see this thought of Irenaeus to be a great leap beyond the simple Christian basics of, “accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and lead a moral life before God and man.” It was an interesting time when great Christian thinkers alternated between reflecting and writing on the mysteries of God and Christ and fleeing for their lives from a persecuting world. The faithful wrote books, and the pagans burned them!

In this world, a controversy arose over what should be the church's mission and message. This controversy found its center in two African towns, Alexandria and Carthage. As discussed in an earlier lesson, Alexandria was the seat of a Catechetical School (read that “a seminary-type school”) and was the center of an approach to scripture that used



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*kephalo* means “head,” which in Latin is “*caput*.” Thus we have the basis for the word “recapitulation.”

allegory as the key to interpretation. Alexandria was the second largest city in the world, had the world's largest library, and was home to a great number of educated students of Greek philosophy. A preeminent example of Alexandria's thought and approach was found in Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), covered in our previous class on this subject.

Meanwhile, just a few hundred miles to the west was the city of Carthage, which was located on what is now the coast of Tunis. If Alexandria was a scholastic town with great interest in Greek philosophy, Carthage, at least measured by its Christian practices and writings, seemed a more pragmatic town. Tertullian (c.155-c.240) and Cyprian (c.210-c.258) are two key players in the church life of this part of North Africa. They were the first Latin writers of the church, Clement of Alexandria and others wrote in Greek, the language of the New Testament. They set the church on a different direction than the leaders from Alexandria.

Clement was a Greek thinker who sought to integrate his Greek knowledge ("science") with Christian belief and Scripture. This is compared to Tertullian who "sought to produce a purely Christian system of belief untainted by pagan or secular modes of thinking."<sup>5</sup>

Let's consider a comparison of the two approaches and then ask what it says to us today, especially in light of scripture.

### **CLEMENT'S APPROACH**

We do not have explicit details about Clement's early life. We can piece together a picture that likely places his birth in Athens to pagan parents.<sup>6</sup> Clement was well educated in Greek thought and he spent time trying out a number of Greek philosophies before he came to Alexandria around 30 years of age. It was in Alexandria that he was exposed to Christianity and converted to the faith.

After becoming a Christian, Clement became active as a writer, teacher, and presbyter. His writings show that he never abdicated his Greek intellectual training, but rather incorporated it extensively into his Christian understanding. His previous intellectual wanderings prior to settling upon Christianity as the ultimate truth included adhering to teachings of Plato<sup>7</sup> (c.427-c.347BC), Aristotle

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<sup>5</sup> Olson, Roger, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (IVP 1999), at 85.

<sup>6</sup> "Clement of Alexandria" *Catholic Encyclopedia*, (Gale 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Technically Clement would be considered a "Middle-Platonist" or perhaps even a "Neo-Platonist," terms that reflect the development of Platonism by the time Clement was writing.

(384-322BC), and the Stoics. Not surprisingly, scholars sometimes term Clement an “eclectic philosopher.”<sup>8</sup> Even with that, however, Clement quickly dismisses a great number of ancient thought systems and their proponents as poor efforts to arrive at real truth.<sup>9</sup>

While disparaging so many Greek thinkers, Clement described Plato in a much different way. Plato was a better guide to truth than the others. Citing numerous works by Plato, Clement showed how Plato was not embracing some idolatrous system that worshipped water (Poseidon), war (Ares), or the “soul of the world,” like the Peripatetics. Plato found it a hard task to “find the Father and Maker of this universe, and when you have found Him, it is impossible to declare him to all.”<sup>10</sup>

While Clement certainly rejected a number of Platonic teachings that were inconsistent with scripture (for example, Clement insisted that God created the world out of nothingness, which was contrary to Platonic philosophy<sup>11</sup>), he embraced a great deal of what he considered Platonic truth into his Christian faith. Believing that all truth was God’s truth regardless of where it is found, Clement readily integrated contemporary secular philosophy into his faith.

I should add that Clement rarely did so as a blatant substitute for scripture or apostolic teaching. Clement believed that his approach was fully consistent with scripture and apostolic authority. In fact, Clement believed that God had providently provided the world with Socrates and Plato to prepare the Greeks for the gospel in the same way that God provided the Old Testament to prepare the Jews for the gospel.<sup>12</sup> Where Paul seems to make negative statements in his epistles about the deceptions of the world’s philosophies, Clement understood

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<sup>8</sup> Lilla, Salvatore, *Clement of Alexandria, A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*, (Wipf & Stock 1971), at 2.

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to see how thoroughly Clement studied and knew the ancient philosophers. His criticisms and exposes on their flawed systems includes indictments of Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Archelaus, Leucippus, Metrodorus, Democritus, Alemaeon, Xenocrates, Epicurus, and more. See, Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, ch. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* at Ch. 6, quoting Plato, *Timaeus* 28c.

<sup>11</sup> Platonism taught creation was never anything specifically directed by God, but was merely an emanation from a divine source.

<sup>12</sup> Clement would refer to Plato as “the truth-loving Plato” who was an imitation of Moses, who brought the law to the Jews.

Paul to be concerned with certain wrong systems of thought, like the Stoicism and Epicureanism Paul confronted in Athens.

Clement almost uses Aristotle's logic in approaching the usefulness of philosophy. For Clement, philosophy meant a clear, precise way to understand what is right and wrong, what is truth and falsehood. In philosophy, Clement could find good examples of how Christians should think and live.

In discussing the need for holiness and piety among believers, Clement alternates between quoting the Psalms and Homer and Plato. Psalm 19:8 is quoted as teaching that "the commandment of the Lord shines afar, giving light to the eyes." Clement adds that by receiving Christ, one receives the power to see and the light that illuminates the pious path, transitioning to a quotation from Homer, "Thus shalt thou well discern who is God and who is but mortal." Clement then quotes Psalm 19:10 adding that Jesus the Word who has given light is "to be desired above gold and precious stone." After all, Clement reasons, Jesus "sharpened the light-bearing eyes of the soul," using an expression of Plato. In *Timaeus*, Plato explained that the gods made eyes as the first feature of the face as the leading part of thought.<sup>13</sup>

### TERTULLIAN'S APPROACH

Tertullian (c.150-222) was born at Carthage sometime in the middle of the second century. Like Clement, he was born into a pagan family, and from his writings scholars can tell he was well read in history, philosophy, religion, and Virgil.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, in spite of some similarities between the background of Clement and Tertullian, once Tertullian became a Christian, he denounced philosophers and any idea that Christianity was Platonic. Tertullian challenged the usefulness and propriety of Greek philosophy as a part of Christian teaching and thought. Tertullian would exclaim, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" It was the idea of mingling philosophy with the gospel that Tertullian reasoned Paul expressly warned of.

Whence spring those "fables and endless genealogies," and  
"unprofitable questions," and "words which spread like a cancer?"  
From all these, when the apostle would restrain us, he expressly

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<sup>13</sup> Clement, at Ch. 11; Plato *Timaeus*, at 45B.

<sup>14</sup> Glover, T. R., and Rendall, Gerald, *Tertullian – Apology DeSpectaculis*, Loeb Classical Library, v. 250 (Harvard 1931), at xiv.

names *philosophy* as that which he would have us be on our guard against. Writing to the Colossians, he says, "See that no one beguile you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and contrary to the wisdom of the Holy Ghost." He had been at Athens, and had in his interviews (with its philosophers) become acquainted with that human wisdom which pretends to know the truth, whilst it only corrupts it, and is itself divided into its own manifold heresies, by the variety of its mutually repugnant sects. What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from "the porch of Solomon," who had himself taught that "the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart." Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief.<sup>15</sup>

As a trained trial lawyer, Tertullian critically examined any approach to faith, looking for the source of the teaching. In Tertullian's mindset, the only useful truth for religious consideration was the revelation of God to Israel and the apostles. Christianity was perfect in and of itself. It needed no help from the pagan thought world.

Tertullian was a contemporary of Clement, teaching in the coastal city of Carthage. In Olson's terminology, "Tertullian was horrified by Clement's overall approach to Christian theology. He spent much of his energy combating it."<sup>16</sup>

Tertullian was much less trusting of man's ability to correctly think and process philosophy outside of scripture itself. For him, it was a very slippery slope into heresy. Furthermore, studying philosophy with an effort to integrate it into Christian faith was adding extra grease to that already slippery slope!

We err with Tertullian if we consider him a non-intellectual. He certainly worked out details of the trinity in ways that no one had previously. He also wrote against heresies, and wrote in defense of Christian faith. But, Tertullian would defend the faith and interpret truth only from within the confines of scripture and apostolic tradition. Tertullian was suspicious of and rejected non-biblical sources for interpreting biblical truths.

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<sup>15</sup> Tertullian, *On the Prescriptions of Heretics*, Ch. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Olson at 90.

Both Clement and Tertullian were not in isolation. In Alexandria, Origen (c.184-c.253) followed his mentor Clement and took Clement's approach and teaching even further. Similarly, in Carthage, Tertullian would influence Cyprian (c.200-258), who left a deep impression on what would later become the Roman Catholic Church.

Origen would write over 800 treatises and would open up the catechetical school to pagan philosophers. Ultimately, the church would proclaim Origen a heretic, in spite of the many wonderful things he did for the faith, because of certain Greek philosophical doctrines that he adhered to, most notably, the idea that human souls pre-existed their birth<sup>17</sup> as well as the idea that God ultimately would save all creatures ("universalism").

Origen would appeal to the Old Testament for his belief that Christianity properly used Greek philosophy. Going to the Exodus story, Origen noted that God had the Israelites flee with possessions of the Egyptians. Origen taught that it was fully appropriate for God's people to use the "spoils of the Egyptians" which, for him, meant the philosophies of the Greeks!

Cyprian, on the other hand, was as pragmatic and non-philosophizing as Tertullian (whom Cyprian termed, "the Master"<sup>18</sup>). For Cyprian, his concerns were about how to live daily and how the church could best organize and provide for its members. Cyprian cared deeply about the church's unity, abhorring both heresy and schism equally. Cyprian set out instructions for basic Catholic uniformity as he taught that the Spirit worked through bishops, and that the church structure is properly built around the bishops and administration of baptism and communion.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This came in handy for Origen when he considered Paul's writings in Romans that God loved Jacob while he hated Esau before either was born. Origen believed that Jacob and Esau had pre-existed their births and had, as spirits, made bad choices upon which God had based his love and hatred.

<sup>18</sup> Cyprian was not an actual student of Tertullian. Tertullian had died by the time Cyprian became a Christian. Cyprian was a student of Tertullian's writings, rather than of the man himself.

<sup>19</sup> While Cyprian was central to the structure of the Catholic Church for centuries to come, at least as far as the guidelines for bishops and clergy roles among the laity, Cyprian also presented the Catholic Church with a difficulty. Cyprian had quite a public fuss with the bishop of Rome, Stephen. The dispute was over whether any one bishop outranked another. In modern words, this means does the bishop of Rome (the Pope) have authority over other bishops who rightfully stand in apostolic succession. Stephen was asserting the supremacy of the Roman bishop in a papal sense, and Stephen would have nothing of it! Ultimately, both Cyprian and Stephen died before the matter was pushed to a head.

## WHAT DO WE MAKE OF THIS?

Are there lessons we can learn about the questions raised in the beginning of this lesson? Are there things in the academic disciplines that can heighten our understanding of Scripture and faith? Can we look at science and better understand God? Or, are academic endeavors a needless diversion that should be removed from the arena of faith?

I readily come down on the side of mutuality. Science is an aid to faith and faith aids science. Certainly we must be careful not to let the tail wag the dog. By that I mean that science does not trump Scripture, nor should we violate the word of God simply to comply with our understanding of physics. But within the framework of careful study and reflection, we can find how truth is truth, regardless of its arena of origin (pun intended). As such, we properly figure out how to integrate that into the larger pictures of knowledge.

## POINTS FOR HOME

What are we to make of this controversy? What does scripture say about it? First, we need to make a few core observations from scripture.

1. *“I know **whom** I have believed and am persuaded that **he** is able to keep that I’ve committed to **him**...”* (2 Tim. 1:12).

Our salvation is based on *whom* we know, not *what* we know. Paul writes, “I know *whom* I have believed and am persuaded that *he* is able to keep that I’ve committed to *him*,” not “I know *what* I have believed.” This cuts both ways. Can someone be saved if he believes something that is not “Biblical?” Certainly! Heaven’s entrance is not a catechetical examination. It is acceptance of the death of Christ on our accord! Yet we are still to strive to understand as well as we can as noted in the next point for home.

2. *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”* (Jn. 14:6).

Is what we believe beyond the atonement of Christ therefore irrelevant? Absolutely not! Paul is quick to talk and write about God, Christ, and pure doctrine. Why? Because doctrine breeds action. We do not live a segmented life where our beliefs exist in a vacuum. What we think is true effects how we choose to live. Jesus said he is the “way, the truth, and the life.” In this sense, he equates all three, the way (our salvation) with truth (reality and thought) and with life. What we think changes what we do.

3. *“What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made”* (Rom. 1:19-20).

I love this passage. It speaks to me of much in the area of science. Science does inform us of God’s character and invisible attributes in so many ways. Our God is one of consistency, just as we see in the laws of physics. Our God is beyond, much as we see in the inspection of space and matter. Our God has set a world in motion that enables healing for disease (medicine). We see marvelous aspects of God in nature that move us properly to praise and worship.

### HOME WORK

To recap, we are memorizing 1 John this year in the English Standard Version. That amounts to two verses a week. To be current, we need to have memorized 1 John 1:1-2:22. This week we add 1 John 2:23-24. We provide all verses below for your help!

**1John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

**1:5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we

confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**1John 2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. **3** And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **4**Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, **5** but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: **6** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. **7** Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. **8** At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. **9** Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. **10** Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. **11** But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

**12** I am writing to you, little children,  
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

**13** I am writing to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,  
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,  
because you know the Father.

**14** I write to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I write to you, young men,  
because you are strong,  
and the word of God abides in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one.

**15** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **17** And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

**18** Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. **19** They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. **20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. **22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. **24** Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.