

## Principles for Transformation: Connecting Personal and Public Life



By Dr. Art Lindsley

I know a pastor whose study contains a desk, a kneeler, and couple of chairs. Sometimes the pastor will study something that leads him to praise God or feel a need to repent. He will quickly move from the desk to the kneeler. He uses the chairs for counseling, mentoring, and offering spiritual direction. It is not unusual for the pastor to move to the desk to study questions raised in these sessions, or go to the kneeler to pray for people and situations of concern.

Knowing, feeling, and doing – study, piety, and ministry – as pictured in the desk, kneeler, and chair are integrally related. If you remove one, damage is done to the other two:

- If you eliminate the desk, you lose depth in prayer (kneeler) and substance in ministry (the chairs).
- If you eliminate the kneeler, you may have deep knowledge (the desk) and consistent practice (the chairs), but you may lack passion and joy in your spiritual life – resulting in a cold, passionless legalism.
- If you eliminate the chairs, you are left with theoretical thought (desk) or piety (kneeler) that makes little difference in the lives of others.

Neglecting any one of these practices results in the loss of all three.

### **The Importance of Knowing**

The Bible gives a solid basis for knowing and doing grounded in an infinite personal God who exists and reveals himself in Scripture. We are created in God's image, with capacity to reason. Sin and our finite nature limit the extent of our knowledge. There is nevertheless that which is true, good, and real – and we can know it objectively, at least in part.

Knowing is important to biblical spirituality. In Matthew 22:37, Christ calls us to love God with all of our hearts, our souls, and our minds.

II Corinthians 10:5 tells us to,

*Destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God...take every thought captive to Christ.*

- The first part of this verse exhorts us to refute objections to faith and alternative systems of thought.
- The second part emphasizes taking every thought captive to Christ.

These tasks are not merely intellectual or speculative duties, but spiritual obligations. A central problem with the church and its failure to impact culture is that we have not emphasized loving God with our minds. Biblical knowledge involves more than the merely cognitive. It also involves intimacy and responsibility.

The Hebrew word for knowing is Yatha. When Genesis speaks of Adam knowing his wife, it uses this word. Likewise, our knowing is to lead to personal intimacy with God.

The Greek word for “hear” is Akuo, and the Greek word for “obey” is Hupakuo. The prefix “hup” in Hupakuo is the word from which we get the word “hyper.” It is one thing to hear, and another thing to “hyper-hear.”

To really hear is to obey. It is one thing to allow truth to go into one ear and out the other. It is another to allow God’s Word to go into your ear, down into your heart, and out into your hands and feet.

### **The Importance of Feeling**

Feeling is first in the order of importance. Our feelings are good, though sometimes twisted by the Fall. Affections are a measure of spirituality and are much to be desired. Jonathan Edwards argued that it was his duty to:

*...raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can provided they are affected by nothing but the truth.*

God intends for us to be satisfied in Him. The Westminster Catechism’s answer to the question, “What is the chief end of man?” is “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever” (emphasis added). We often forget the latter part of the answer. We are created to feel the greatest joy when God is most glorified.

Nothing produces emotion like truth. The disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 got perhaps the greatest Bible study ever given when Jesus expounded all the things in the law, prophets, and writings of Scripture that pointed to him. These disciples described their emotion in Luke 24:32:

*Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*

Nothing will produce this kind of burning in the heart like truth.

### **The Connection Between Knowing, Feeling, and Doing**

There is a sense in which we can say that knowing leads to feeling, which leads to doing:

- We know what is true.
- We feel passionately about this truth.
- Our passion for our belief motivates us to act.

We see knowing, feeling, and doing mentioned together in John 13:17 (emphasis added):

*If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.*

Romans 6:17 mentions knowing, feeling, and doing in reverse order:

*But God be thanked that you have obeyed from the heart the form of sound doctrine delivered to you.*

In Romans 12:1, Paul presents a summary of Romans up to chapter twelve and the foundation on which later ethical sections are laid:

*Therefore my brothers, by the mercies of God, offer up your bodies as a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service.*

The ethics of the latter chapters of Romans, chapters 12-16, are based on the doctrines outlined in Romans 1-11. Notice the progression of Romans: knowing doctrine provides a basis for doing – the offering up our bodies as living sacrifices.

Knowing leads to feeling. Feeling leads to doing. There is also a reciprocal relationship between knowing and doing. John 8:32 says,

*If you abide in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

Doing (abiding) leads to knowing (the truth), which leads to feeling (freedom). In John 7:17 we read,

*If any man is willing to do [God's] will, he shall know of the teacher whether it is of God.*

If you eliminate or diminish the power of any one aspect, you deprive all three.

- If you eliminate or minimize knowing, you lessen feeling and lose strong motivation for doing.
- A loss of doing leads to a corresponding loss of knowing and feeling.
- A diminishing of feeling means a lack of motivation for doing and lessened knowledge.

Rather than a strong grasp of the truth of Christ leading to passionate love of Christ that motivates you to act on behalf of his kingdom in this world, there is a loss of knowing, feeling, and doing. If you leave out any one element, you will lose all three.

### **Knowing, Feeling, and Doing in the Church**

If we look at today's church, we can discern three schools of thought, each centered around knowing or feeling or doing. We also see what the distortion of each of these areas looks like:

- 1) Doctrine (knowing): This school is rightly critical of the lack of truth in the church, its superficial piety, and the flurry of activity that is often uninformed by Biblical priorities.
- 2) Piety (feeling): This school is rightly critical of ivory tower scholars who lack a passion for God.
- 3) Reform (doing): This school points to society's great needs, and rightly criticizes those who want to only study theology or pray but fail to act in culturally-redeeming ways.

Each of these schools, by defending only their particular stance, falls prey to one-sided excess:

- Doctrine, rather than enriching and motivating our lives, can become dogmatism.
- Piety, instead of producing passionate action, can isolate one from other people.
- Reform can gradually become weary, bitter, and cynical, leading to activism lacking love and joy.

Each orientation needs the other two. If you leave out one, you will lose all three.

It is difficult to maintain the proper proportion of each orientation for long. We need to keep studying the Scriptures and learning from each other. Timothy Keller makes several suggestions for balancing all three schools in our lives:

- Read each other's reading lists.
- Hold regular discussions in our communities.
- Set aside time to work through our differences before they become raging controversies or judicial complaints.

The unity between knowing, feeling, and doing is simpler to lay down in biblical terms than it is to live out in real life. We all tend to lean towards one of these schools and need nudging towards a more balanced emphasis on all three areas.

Above all, we need to preserve in this generation the importance of truth (knowing), a passion for God (feeling), and a view of life that leads to cultural transformation (doing).