

1 **Skepticism, Postmodernism, &**

Knowing Christianity Is True

- Module: Epistemology
- Lesson 6

2 **About Epistemic Skepticism: Doubting the Possibility of Knowing**

- Three Kinds of Skeptics
- The iterative (repetitive) skeptic
 - His skepticism is merely a game of infinite regress.
 - (Like the child who repeatedly asks “Why?” to every answer.)
 - This person is like the scoffer in Proverbs.
 - There is little, if any, profit in engaging this person.
- The methodological skeptic
 - This is merely an approach to acquiring knowledge. One assumes a stance of skepticism as she seeks to acquire evidence or argument for something.
- The true, philosophical skeptic
 - His skepticism is based on philosophical argument.
 - This kind of skeptic can be engaged.

3 **Skepticism About Knowing**

- What it claims:
 - The argument from error: Since we’ve been mistaken in the past, we can never know we’re not mistaken now.
 - The argument concerning the transfer of justification: Just because you’ve been right in other areas you can’t know you are right in this specific area.
 - The argument regarding the brain in the vat: We cannot know with absolute certainty that we are not just brains in a vat, being stimulated by a mad scientist.

4 **Answering the Skeptic**

- He makes an error regarding the “epistemic task.”
 - The epistemic task is twofold:
 - Acquiring true beliefs
 - Avoiding false beliefs
 - The skeptic erroneously makes the second task the overwhelming priority.
 - In doing so, he or she effectively renders the first task impossible.

5 Answering the Skeptic

- Knowledge doesn't require absolute certainty.
 - Absolute certainty in most areas is likely not achievable.
 - Defining knowledge as absolute certainty renders the first epistemic task (acquiring true beliefs) impossible to achieve.
 - Remember Swinburne's Principle of Credulity: What one seems to perceive is probably so.
- A confusion of logical "might" (what might be logically possible, however remotely) with epistemic "might" (what it is reasonable to believe).
 - Logically, I "might" be mistaken about what I believe/know. (It might be possible to construct a logical argument, employing the remotest possibilities, that I am mistaken. e.g. It's logically possible I'm dreaming I'm having these experiences right now, regardless of how remote that possibility is.)
 - But epistemically, do I have any good reasons to believe I am mistaken? Without such good reasons (defeaters), I am justified in holding to my belief.
- Skepticism is self-refuting. (It claims to know that it is impossible to know.)

6 About Postmodernism

- Originated in the mid-twentieth century in literary studies, sociology, and philosophy.
- A reaction to modernism and the failure of Marxism and rationalism and empiricism. (More on this in Worldviews module.)
- Diversity of PM. (We will limit our present discussion to the matter of knowing.)
- Its focus is on the ideas of language and truth. (Since people think in a particular language, a person's language/culture determines one's idea of reality. Different languages lead to different truths.)
- Regarding truth, it employs relativism vs. absolutism.
- Its influence in the contemporary culture.
 - It permeates much of people's thinking about literature (including the Bible), truth, ethics, values, and religion.
 - Yet, claims that we live in a "postmodern culture" are likely overstated, as it is impossible to live in a consistently postmodern framework.

7 What PM Claims re: Knowing and Truth

- There is no such thing as a metanarrative.
 - A metanarrative is a grand narrative or over-arching "story" that claims to explain all reality and be true for all people.
 - PM holds there are only local narratives. (Every group or person has its own unique narrative, which constitutes its own "truth.")

- There is no such thing as universal, objective reality.
 - Regarding epistemological justification (how we justify claims of knowledge)— it rejects foundationalism and holds coherentism.
 - Regarding truth—it rejects correspondence, and holds to coherence.
- There is no such thing as “authorial intent.”
 - At least not one that is accessible to interpreters.
 - The meaning of a text, then, does not reside in the intent of the author, but resides in the reader or community of readers, (The reader discovers his or her own meaning in the text.)

8 Answering Postmodernism

- The coherence theory of truth is inadequate. (Based on coherence view of justification, circular, allows for contradictory “truths.”)
- People do not always think in a language. (e. g. small children)
- PM is confused about what is the “truth bearer?”
 - Language, sentences, etc.?
 - Thoughts, beliefs, etc.?
 - Propositions (the content of thoughts, sentences, etc.) appears to be the best candidate for what is the “truth bearer.”
- PM is self-refuting.
 - It is itself a metanarrative which denies metanarratives.
 - Its authors normally insist on their readers accepting their authorial intent.

9 What Have We Learned So Far?

- Knowing is Justified True Belief.
- Claims to possess knowledge are justified (epistemic justification) if—
 - our beliefs are based on other beliefs which finally rest on a foundation of properly basic beliefs. (Foundationalism. Historic view of epistemic justification.)
 - (Coherentism, fails as an adequate view of epistemic justification.)
- What truth is.
 - That which corresponds to the way things really are (Correspondence).
 - (A coherence theory of truth is inadequate.)
- Challenges to knowing fall short for, among other things, their self-refuting nature.
 - Skepticism

- Postmodernism

10 **Knowing Christianity is True**

- Colossians 2:2
...that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself.
- 1 Thessalonians 1:5
For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.
- Hebrews 6:11
And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

11 **Knowing vs. Showing**

- There is a difference between knowing and showing. (How I know my faith to be true is different from how I can show to someone else it is true.)
- As a Christian, I have access to a broader evidence base than does the non-believer.

12 **Evidence Bases**

- Non-Christian has access to:
 - General revelation (evidences in nature)
 - Natural theology (evidences in reason and philosophy)
 - Calvin's sensus divinitatis
 - Religious type experiences (guilt, gratitude, awe, dreams, desire/joy, etc.)
 - Knowledge of the Gospel
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- Christian has access to:
 - General revelation (evidences in nature)
 - Natural theology (evidences in reason and philosophy)
 - Calvin's sensus divinitatis
 - Religious type experiences (guilt, gratitude, awe, dreams, desire/joy, etc.)
 - Knowledge of the Gospel
 - Witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit

13 **The Holy Spirit As Witness To The Believer**

- Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples.

- “If I go [to the Father] I will send a Comforter.” (Jn. 16:7)
- The Holy Spirit “will guide you into all truth.” (Jn. 16:13)
- “You will all know.” (Jn. 14:20, 26)

14 **The Holy Spirit As Witness To The Believer**

- The giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4)...
 - Confirmed that Jesus was, in fact, with the Father.
 - (“I am going to Him who sent me. ...if I go, I will send [the Helper] to you.” Jn. 16:5, 7)
 - Confirmed that Jesus was, in fact, in them.
 - (“We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us.” 1 Jn. 3:24)

15 **The Holy Spirit As Witness To The Believer**

- The testimony of the Spirit is self-authenticating (properly basic).
 - You have an anointing. (Jn. 2:20, 21)
 - His Spirit testifies to our spirit. (Rom. 8:16)
 - The Spirit in us cries “Abba, Father.” (Gal. 4:6)
 - This inner witness of the Spirit—
 - is veridical (truthful) and unmistakable.
 - is not necessarily irresistible or indubitable.

16 **The Holy Spirit As Witness To The Believer**

- Hence, the Christian possesses “properly basic beliefs” of the truth of his faith.
 - John Calvin’s *sensus divinitatis*.
 - The internal witness of the indwelling Spirit.
- A Christian can know Christianity is true, apart from any external evidences or reasoning from inferences.

17 **The Holy Spirit As Witness To The Believer**

- Objection: What of similar claims of other religions? (e.g. Mormonism’s “burning in the bosom”)
 - Their claims may, in part, be true. (God may be revealing, but they are misinterpreting.)
 - Their experiences may be similar, without being the same experiences.
 - The existence of experiences wrongly interpreted does not disprove experiences correctly interpreted.
 - Don’t mistake an experience or emotion as the witness of the indwelling Spirit.
 - As a properly basic belief the witness of the indwelling Spirit is self-presenting, self-evident, and not based on external evidence, experiences, or emotions. It is basic.
 - The witness of the indwelling spirit may, or may not, be accompanied by an emotional sensation.

- An “experience” or emotion is not a properly basic belief.
 - Experiences and emotions do not possess propositional content (they are not true or false).
 - Experiences and emotions can be interpreted in various ways.

18 **The Holy Spirit As Witness To The Believer**

- Confusion over the distinct works of the Spirit between believers and non-believers may lead some to question the value of apologetics.
 - The Christian possesses a Spirit-induced certainty that the unbeliever does not possess.
 - We may mistakenly expect the unbeliever to possess such certainty apart from evidence and reason.

19 **Some Important Points To Keep In Mind About The Witness of the Spirit**

- Martin Luther’s magisterial vs. ministerial testimony. According to Luther:
 - The testimony of the Spirit is magisterial (because it is properly basic, foundational).
 - The testimony of reason, logic, and argument is ministerial. (It assists or serves the testimony of the Spirit.)
- The believer then has double justification for his faith.
 - First, the testimony of the Holy Spirit accompanied by the *sensus divinitatis*.
 - Second, the evidence of reason, logic, argument, general revelation, etc.
- When reason and argument fail us, we still possess the overriding magisterial warrant provided by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

20 **How Can The Non-Christian Know?**

- Their evidence base lacks the witness of the Holy Spirit.
- Their experiences may appear to contradict that of the Christian’s.
- How can the Christian show to the unbeliever?
 - Find common ground in general revelation, reason, logic, and argument.
 - Give them an experience of God (His love).
- The role of the Holy Spirit:
 - He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16:7-11)
 - Though the unbeliever does not have the indwelling Spirit, yet the Spirit is active in wooing her or him.
- Remember, ultimately, it is a moral choice to believe.

21 **Next Week**

- Argumentation: The Ways We Reason