



## **KNOWING, FEELING, AND DOING**

*Art Lindsley, PhD*

### **FOUNDATIONS**

A prominent pastor from California was on a flight returning to Los Angeles from the East Coast. The pilot announced that there had been an earthquake while they were in the air. The earthquake had centered in the very area where the pastor's large church was located. You can imagine his concern. When he landed, his first thought was to go to the church to see if there was any damage. When he arrived, he was delighted to see that there were no cracks in the walls, no broken windows, no visible damage at all. It was only later that they found out that the foundation had moved and the whole building had to be destroyed.

In Psalm 11:3 it says "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Many articles and books have been written on the present battle for the soul of this nation. It is hard to deny that there has been a significant decline in our moral state. How can the foundations be restored? While there are many levels on which we can attempt to answer this question, we need to go back to basics.

### **OUR PRESENT STATE**

One problem in the modern and post-modern situation, as well as in the church, is the failure to see the connection between what we do, what we think and what we feel. In other words, we don't understand the relationship between knowing, feeling and doing. Thus we fail to manifest wise, passionate practice that would demonstrate to the world the truth we profess.

One godly man's study contained a desk, a kneeler, and a couple of chairs. The desk and its accompanying chair were well worn from hours of study, and most of the books that lined the shelves around the room had been opened and carefully studied. The kneeler was not far from the desk and faced a window overlooking trees and rolling hills in a country setting. It also was well worn from many hours of use. Sometimes the pastor would study something that would lead him to praise God, or give thanks, or feel a need to repent. He would quickly move from the desk to the kneeler. In the study there were also a couple of soft chairs often used for counseling, mentoring or spiritual direction. It was not unusual after such sessions for the pastor to move to the desk to study questions and issues raised or to the kneeler to pray for the people and the situations of concern.

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 (chairs). If you eliminate the kneeler, you may have deep knowledge (desk) and consistent practice (chairs), but you will lack passion and joy, perhaps ending up with a cold, passionless legalism and moralism that will inevitably become weary in well doing. If you eliminate the chairs, you end up with theoretical thought (desk) or piety (knowing) that makes little difference in peoples' lives. You need all three.

Knowing (study), feeling (piety), and doing (ministry) are integrally related. This article will first explore the Biblical importance of knowing, the relation between knowing and feeling, the relation between knowing, feeling, and doing, and then its importance for the church. My thesis is that if you neglect any one of these (the desk, the kneeler, or the chairs), you will in effect lose all three.

## IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING

First, the place of Knowing (the desk). The Bible gives a solid basis for knowing and doing grounded in an infinite personal God who exists and who reveals Himself in Scripture. The world God created is real and good. We are created in God's image with a capacity to reason, feel, and act. We are also created to respond to a real God, respond to real people, and exercise dominion over a real creation. We are created to respond to reality. Sin certainly does distort our perception of reality, and our finitude limits the extent of our knowledge; but there is nevertheless that which is true, good, and real objectively, and we can know it, at least in part.

Knowing is important to Biblical spirituality. In Matthew 22:37 Christ calls us to "love God with all of your heart, with all your soul, and with all of your mind." Yet not only is the mind depreciated within the culture but also surprisingly within the church. Perhaps some think that you can love God too much with your mind. Yet, can you love God too much with your heart or soul? I think not. The problem is not loving God too much with your mind but, perhaps, loving God with your heart and soul too little. I believe that a central problem with the church and its failure to impact culture is that we have not emphasized loving God with our minds. We need to repent for this deficiency as we would over any other sin.

In II Corinthians 10:5 we are called to "destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" and "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." The first part of this verse emphasizes a more negative or critical task of refuting objections to faith or alternative systems of thought. The second part stresses a positive task of taking every thought captive to Christ. This is a spiritual responsibility for all believers. It is not merely an intellectual or speculative duty but a spiritual obligation. The failure to pursue this task has led to a virtual loss of the "culture wars." By and large, believers have lost (1) universities, (2) media-journalism, TV and

movies, (3) foundations, to a more secular perspective. There are, to be sure, believers that remain salt and light in these arenas, but they are nevertheless mostly controlled by secular forces.

Books such as *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, *No Place for Truth*, and *Passion for Truth* document this problem in contemporary society. We need reformation individually, corporately, and culturally in this area.

In I Corinthians 2:16 we are said to have the “mind of Christ”. In Romans 12:2 we are to be transformed by the “renewing of our mind.” Hebrews 5:12 seems to be speaking to all believers when it says, “by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food”.

It is important to note that Biblical knowing involves more than the merely cognitive. It involves intimacy and responsibility. The Hebrew word for knowing is *Yatha*. When Genesis speaks of Adam knowing his wife, it uses this word. This knowing is certainly more than knowing about, involving sexual intimacy. In Psalm 1:6 it says that “the Lord knows the way of the righteous”. Notice it does not say earlier that the Lord knows the way of the wicked, although of course He knows about them. The phrase the “Lord knows” means cares for, gives approval to, has regard for, or loves the way of the righteous. In Matthew 7:23 Jesus says of those who say, “Lord, Lord” - “I never knew you,” although again, He knew about them. He didn’t know them in the sense of an intimate personal relationship. Our knowing is to lead to personal intimacy with God.

It is also interesting that the Greek word for “hear” is *Akuo*, while the Greek word for “obey” is *Hupakuo*. The prefix hup-akuo is the word from which we get the word “hyper.” It is one thing to hear and another to hyper-hear. To really hear is to obey. There are those who hear yet fail to understand. There are those who see yet don’t perceive. No wonder the Biblical writers often say, “Let him who has an ear to hear, let him hear.” It is one thing to allow a 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.

## KNOWING AND FEELING

Second, the relation of knowing and feeling (desk and kneeler). We might ask the question, “Which is more important, knowing Scripture or feeling?” R.C. Sproul talks about two primacies. There is a primacy of intellect in the order of knowing and a primacy of experience in the order of importance. The intellect is first in the order of knowing because God has given us the Scriptures as the central way of revealing Himself to us.<sup>1</sup> Os Guinness maintains that “Christianity is much more than rational, but certainly not less than rational.” We use our mind to study the Bible, but we should not stop there, but be concerned to experience what we study.

Yet, 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 argues that it is his duty: “to raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can provided they are affected by nothing but the truth.”<sup>2</sup>

God has meant 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.” We may forget the latter part of the answer. It can be argued that our purpose is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. It just happens that we are created to feel the

greatest joy when God is Most glorified. John Piper has emphasized that “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”<sup>3</sup>

There is nothing that produces emotion like the truth. The disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 got perhaps the greatest Bible study ever given where Jesus expounded all the things in the Law, Prophets and Writings that pointed to Him. They later describe their emotion: “Didn’t our hearts burn within us” as He explained “the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). There is nothing that will produce this kind of burning like truth. Many times I have been moved by theological study to prayer, praise, thanksgiving, or repentance.

Yet it is so easy to manipulate emotions. Remember your high school or college pep rallies? It is possible to get people very excited apart from truth. Movie producers know how to get you to feel what they want unless you consciously resist. It is easy to identify or cheer a character’s action that in a saner moment you might strongly reject. There is a section of Alexander Pope’s “Essay on Man” that is a haunting commentary on our times:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As to be hated, needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.<sup>4</sup>

You can begin to feel good about what is bad and feel bad about what is good. Certainly, it is easy for feelings to become distorted even in worship. Edwards points out:

*If a minister be driven with a fierce and intemperate zeal and vehement heat, without light, he will likely kindle the like unhallowed flame in his people and to fire their corrupt passions and affections, but will make them never the better, nor lead them a step towards heaven, but drive them apace the other way.<sup>5</sup>*

Of course the ideal is both light and heat. Not light without heat, or heat without light, but light and heat. Puritan pastor Richard Baxter followed the method in his preaching: first light then heat. He would expound a text then forcefully apply it.<sup>6</sup> Quoting Martyn Lloyd Jones, John Stott defines preaching as “logic on fire.”<sup>7</sup> Stott talks about two extremes to be avoided, paraphrasing Bishop Handley Moule. First is an un-devotional theology—a theology that does not touch the heart, devoid of feeling. And, second, is an un-theological devotion—a superficial devotion lacking in substance, based on milk rather than on solid food.<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis said he got more benefit from doctrinal books than some “devotional” books because they were so light on substance.<sup>9</sup>

## **KNOWING, FEELING, AND DOING**

Third, the relation between knowing, feeling and doing (desk and kneeler and chairs). There is a sense in which we can say that knowing leads to feeling, which leads to doing. We know what is true, feel passionately about it and thus are motivated to act. An old poem says:

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;  
In feelings, not in figures on a dial...  
He lives most Who thinks most, feels the noblest, and acts the best.<sup>10</sup>

This is true especially when we think most about the one who is most worthy, feel consumed by worship for him, and act according to His will.

In John 13:17 we see the three mentioned together: “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” Romans 6:17 mentions them in reverse order: “But God be thanked that you have obeyed from the heart the form of sound doctrine delivered to you.”

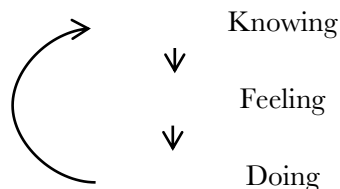
In Romans 12:1 you have a summary of Romans up to that point and the foundation on which later ethical sections are laid: “Therefore my brothers, by the mercies of God, offer up your bodies as a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service.” The doctrines developed in the first eleven chapters of Romans (the mercies of God) ought necessarily to lead you to the conclusion (therefore) of wholesale commitment to our Lord. In fact, it is the only logical conclusion, the only adequate response (your reasonable service). The ethics of the latter chapters of Romans (12+) are based on the doctrines of the former chapters (1-11). Knowing provides a basis for doing.

Not only does knowing lead to feeling, which leads to doing, but there is a reciprocal relationship between doing and knowing. In John 8:32 it says, “If you abide in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” So 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 His will, he shall know of the teaching whether it is of God.” Bonhoeffer argues in *The Cost of Discipleship* that those who believe obey. We have seen how knowing and consequent faith leads to doing. However, Bonhoeffer also maintained that those who obey believe.<sup>11</sup> When you do His will, or abide in His word, you find out how true it is. You find out in experience and practice just how adequately God’s truth “fits” in our personal and public life. G.K. Chesterton said:

*[A man] is partially convinced because he has found this or that specific proof of the thing, and he can eloquently expound on that one point. But a man is not really convinced of a philosophical theory when he finds that only one thing proves it. He is only really convinced when he finds everything proves it.*<sup>12</sup>

Reason can only take you so far. It is Christ’s capacity to shed his light on all of life that makes Him ultimately persuasive. C.S. Lewis similarly maintains, “I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”<sup>13</sup>

You could illustrate the relationship through the following diagram:



If you eliminate or diminish the power of any one, you deprive all three. If you eliminate (or minimize) knowing, you lessen feeling and lose a 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 a passionate love of Christ that constrains you to act, there is a loss of knowing, feeling and doing. Again, if you leave out any one, you lose all three.

## APPLICATION TO THE CHURCH

In fact, if we look at today's church we can discern three schools of thought, each centered around knowing or feeling or doing:

		<u>Distortion</u>
(1)	Doctrine (knowing)	Dogmatism
(2)	Piety (feeling)	Pietism
(3)	Reform (doing)	Activism

The "Doctrine" school is (rightly) critical of the lack of truth in the church, the superficial piety, and the flurry of activity that is often uninformed by Biblical priorities. The "Piety" school is (rightly) critical of those who are ivory tower scholars who only want to dot their "i"s and cross their "t"s but lack a passion for God. The "Reform" school points (rightly) to the great needs in the society and is very critical of those who just want to theologize or pray but not act in culturally redeeming ways. In each of these orientations, by defending their particular stance, a one-sided excess creeps in. "Doctrine" rather than enriching and motivating our lives, becomes "Dogmatism." "Piety" instead of producing passionate action can become isolated from others. "Reform" can gradually become weary, bitter and cynical, leading to a kind of "Activism" without love or joy. Each needs the other two. In fact, if you leave out one, you in effect lose all three.

Tim Keller in a speech to the PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) General Assembly develops the conflict between what he (and George Marsden) call the doctrinalist, pietist, and culturalist impulses. These categories correspond to the knowing, feeling, and doing or Doctrine, Piety, Reform motifs discussed above. Although he develops his argument with respect to different movements within the PCA, we can see representatives of these schools in other denominations and para-church ministries in evangelicalism. Keller discusses the tension between these branches:

*The doctrinalists are always worried there are 'stealth liberals' in our midst and the social engagement emphasis of some churches will inevitably lead to doctrinal compromise. Those in the social justice branch are afraid that others in the denomination are becoming culturally reactionary, and many in their phobia against social involvement become as blind to injustice as the Old School has been in the past (e.g. slavery). Those in the pietist branch feel that a lack of evangelistic fervor is a serious sin, and they doubt the spiritual vitality of the other branches. Then along comes an issue and the pent-up energy (the fear and frustration) is released.<sup>14</sup>*

Even though there is an important Biblical insight that each branch puts forth, they tend to have their own unique weakness. The critiques of each branch are usually on the mark. Keller observes,

*The doctrinalist branch can breed smugness and self-righteousness over its purity... the pietist branch is very pragmatic and results-minded, and is resistant to enter into processes of discipline or theological debate... the culturalist branch becomes too enamored with modern scholarship [with a corresponding] erosion of orthodox theology.<sup>15</sup>*

Keller argues that when a church tries to purge one of these branches, it finds that in a generation or two, its younger leaders are drawn to the lost branches. Each branch needs the others to counter its own tendencies. Each has its own blind spots and weaknesses. Keller writes,

*Richard Lovelace used to say doctrinalists are like white corpuscles that are better at defending the faith (against heretical 'infections') than propagating the faith. The pietists and reformists are like red corpuscles that in their pragmatism do a better job of propagating the faith and yet often lay it open to doctrinal indifference or decline. Too many white blood cells over red blood cells is leukemia; too many red blood cells over white blood cells is AIDS. We need each other. We can't live comfortably with each other, but we are much less robust and vital apart from each other.<sup>16</sup>*

Not only are all three branches rooted in Biblical ground discussed earlier, but each needs the others to correct its own excesses or blind spots. In the real world after the fall, it is difficult (if not impossible) to maintain the proper proportion or balance for long. We need to keep studying the Scriptures and learning from each other.

Keller suggests that we read each other's reading lists (which are often quite different), have regular discussions in communities (like presbyteries), and set aside time to work through our differences before they become raging controversies or judicial complaints (church courts).

The unity between knowing, feeling, and doing is simpler to lay down in Biblical terms than it is to live out in real life. The reality because of the Fall is that we all tend towards one of these schools and need to be nudged gently (or not so gently) to a more full-orbed 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).

Art Lindsley, PhD is vice president of theological initiatives at the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics. For more information, visit [www.tifwe.org](http://www.tifwe.org).<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Part III," *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (1758).

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, "We Want You to Be a Christian Hedonist!" *DesiringGod.org*, accessed June 6, 2012, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/we-want-you-to-be-a-christian-hedonist>.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Pope, "Epistle III," *Essays on Man* (1734).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (1746).

<sup>6</sup> David Calhoun, "Lesson 15," *Reformation and Modern Church History* (St. Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2006), 5.

<sup>7</sup> John Stott, *Balanced Christianity* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> John Stott, "The Message of Romans" (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 311.

<sup>9</sup> R. L. Green and W. Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974), 115.

<sup>10</sup> Philip James Bailey, "We live in deeds," *Festus* (1839).

<sup>11</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937).

<sup>12</sup> G.K. Chesterton, "The Paradoxes of Christianity," *Orthodoxy* (1908).

<sup>13</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?," (1945).

<sup>14</sup> Tim Keller, "What's so Great about the PCA," (Speech, PCA General Assembly, June 10, 2010), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Keller, "What's so Great about the PCA," (Speech, PCA General Assembly, June 10, 2010), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Keller, "What's so Great about the PCA," (Speech, PCA General Assembly, June 10, 2010), 18.