

ARE WE TOO COMFORTABLE IN OUR IGNORANCE?

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One evening a dear Christian friend said to me that he had become “*too comfortable in his ignorance.*” I asked him if he would unpack that statement. In so many words, he proceeded to tell me that “*ignorance*” led him to a “*state*” of “*indifference.*” Realizing this shortcoming in his Christian life he made the decision to begin the process of “*peeling back*” his indifference by both pro-actively pursuing apologetic, biblical, theological studies, and evangelistic opportunities in order that he might exchange his coziness for Christ-like “*faithfulness.*”

I was strikingly impressed with the connection he made between willful “*ignorance*” and “*indifference.*” As I thought more about his statement I proceeded to explore what the Bible teaches about “*ignorance.*” Therefore, we will begin by examining what “*ignorance*” means and proceed to take an assessment to determine how comfortable we might be in our ignorance. We will then conclude with potential suggestions on how we might live differently as a result of that assessment.

II. What does “*Ignorance*” mean?

A. In English the word “*ignorance*” has two basic nuances:

- (1) Lack of knowledge or education
- (2) Unawareness of something, often of something important.

B. In biblical Greek the primary word for “*ignorance*” is ἄγνοια [*agnoia* /ag·noy·ah/]. This word has two basic nuances:

- (1) Lack of divine knowledge;
- (2) Moral ignorance.
 - a. “*Ignorance*” in Scripture typically has a moral, not an intellectual connotation though there are exceptions. For example:
 1. Romans 1:13 where the apostle Paul uses this word to express the idea of “*informing*” someone, “*Now I do not want you to be unaware brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now)*”

C. Other words and issues in the semantic range of “*ignorance*” include the following:

- (1) Ignorant [ἀπαίδευτος, ον]: This word pertains to that which or one who fails to reflect formal instruction or training—they are uneducated, foolish, or ignorant as reflected in the warning in 2 Timothy 2:23: “*but stay away from foolish and ignorant arguments.*”¹

¹Louw, Johannes P. ; Nida, Eugene Albert: *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York : United Bible societies, 1996, c1989, S. 1:328.

- (2) Ignorance [ἀμαθής, ἔς]: This word refers to one who has not acquired a formal education, and hence it bears the implication of being stupid and ignorant— ‘uneducated, unlearned, ignorant as stated in 2 Peter 3:15, “There are some difficult things in his letters which ignorant and unstable people explain falsely.”²
- (3) Interestingly, ignorance may lead to a “*hardening of the heart*” (Ephesians 4:18 cf. 2 Cor. 4:4):
- a. **Ephesians 4:18:** “being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance [*agnoia*] that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart”
 1. The verb “darkened” is κοτόω (*skotoō*), σκοτόομαι (*skotoomai*):
 - a. Used as a deponent verb with middle or passive form with active meaning) **become dark** (ex. Rev. 9:2; 16:10)
 - b. Used as a deponent verb with middle or passive form with active meaning) **unable to understand**, formally, darken the mind (Eph. 4:18)³
 2. The word “**understanding**” is διάνοια (*dianoia*; /dee·an·oy·ah/) and has four nuances as used in Scripture:
 - a. Mind, reasoning, understanding, thinking (ex. Eph 4:18);
 - b. Way of thinking, disposition, manner of thought (ex. Col 1:21);
 - c. Thought, the content of what one is thinking (ex. Luke 1:51);
 - d. Be ready to learn, prepare for action (ex. 1 Peter 1:13).⁴
 3. The word “**hardness**” is πώρωσις [*porosis* /po·ro·sis/] noun/female and generally denotes the following:
 - a. The covering with a callus;
 - b. Obtrusiveness of mental discernment, dulled perception;
 - c. The mind of one has been blunted, of stubbornness, obduracy.⁵

²Louw, Johannes P.; Nida, Eugene Albert: *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York : United Bible societies, 1996, c1989, S. 1:328

³Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. GGK5031

⁴Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. GGK1379

⁵Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G4457

The term “hardness” (*pōrōō* (*pērōō*), *pōrōsis* (*pērosis*) is nicely explained in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament-Abridged*

This word group is used medically for the “hardening” or “thickening” of the bone, e.g., in fractures. Hence it may also denote “healing.” In a transferred sense it means “to make insensitive.”

2. The LXX uses it only in Job 17:7 (for the dimming of the eyes) and Prov. 10:20.

3. The verb occurs five times in the NT, usually with the heart in view. The hardening is that of the Jews in Jn. 12:40; Rom. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:14, and the disciples in Mk. 6:52; 8:17. The verbal noun occurs three times with reference to Jews or Gentiles in Mk. 3:5; Eph. 4:18; Rom. 11:25. God is the author in Jn. 12:40, but God’s hardening is also a self-hardening, so that personal responsibility remains and a call can go out for repentance (Ezek. 18:31). Sin and unbelief are the punishment of sin and unbelief, but renewal by God is still a possibility (Is. 6:11ff.). In Rom. 9-11 Paul perceives a partial hardening of Israel, but believing Gentiles may boast only of the divine grace that includes the hope of a conversion of hardened Israel (11:33ff.) both by human decision and sovereign divine act (11:23, 17ff.). Connected with divine hardening is the self-hardening of 2 Cor. 3:14, from which even disciples are not exempt (Mk. 6:52) in their misunderstanding of Jesus’ sayings.

4. In most of the above references we find the variant *pērōō*, “to maim,” “to wound,” and hence “to blind.” The verb is found in Mk. 6:17; Jn. 12:40; Rom. 11:7, and *pērōsis* in Mk. 3:5. Ancient translations assume *pērōō* or *pērōsis* in other verses too. But *pōr-* is better attested, and *pēr-*, being more common, is more likely to have been substituted for it.⁶

b. **2 Corinthians 4:4:** “in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

(4) Ignorance may even be deliberate as used in Romans 1:18, 10:3, and 2 Peter 3:5

a. **Romans 1:18:** *κατέχω* [*katecho* /*kat-ekh-o*/]. “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth¹ in unrighteousness,*”⁷ This word occurs 19 times and may mean the following:

1. To hold back, detain, retain. from going away; to restrain, hinder (the course or progress of); that which hinders, Antichrist from making his appearance; to check a ship’s headway i.e. to hold or head the ship; to hold fast, keep secure, keep firm possession of.

⁶Kittel, Gerhard; Friedrich, Gerhard; Bromiley, Geoffrey William: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985, S. 817

⁷ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. Ro 1:18

2. To get possession of, take, to possess.⁸

b. **Romans 10:3:** ἄγνοέω [agnoeo /ag-no-eh-o/]. “For not **knowing** about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”⁹ This word “agnoeo” occurs 22 times in biblical Greek and has three nuances:

1. To be ignorant, not to know.
2. Not to understand, unknown.
3. To err or sin through mistake, to be wrong.

c. **2 Peter 3:5:** λανθάνω [lanthano /lan-than-o/]. “For when they maintain this, it escapes their **notice** that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.”¹⁰

1. The word “notice” means to be hidden, to be hidden from one, secretly, unawares, without knowing.¹¹

D. **Lastly, in Hebrew, “unintentional” or “unknown” שגגה [shâgagah /sheg-aw-gaw/] is related to ignorance.** Nevertheless, sins of ignorance that were committed in the by people as a whole (Numbers 15:24-26) or by individuals (Numbers 15:27-298) were remedied by the offering of sacrifices. Thus, they were guilty; they were in the wrong; they committed mistakes.

Therefore, in sum, we are able to make the following statements:

1. Ignorance of God’s Word is unbiblical whereas knowing God’s Word is biblical.
2. Ignorance of God’s Word is sinfulness whereas knowing and applying God’s Word honors Him.
3. Ignorance of God’s Word may lead to self-hardening of the heart whereas knowing God’s Word leads to a joyful predisposition.
4. Ignorance of God’s Word leads to errors, mistakes, and wrongful choices whereas knowing God’s Word leads to wisdom living.
5. Ignorance of God’s Word leads to ungodliness whereas knowing God’s Word may lead to Christ-likeness.

⁸Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G2722

⁹ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update.* LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. Ro 10:3

¹⁰ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update.* LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. 2 Pe 3:4-6

¹¹Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G2990

II. ASSESSMENT TO DETERMINE IF WE ARE TOO COMFORTABLE IN OUR IGNORANCE?

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Answer the following questions honestly; be sure to avoid excessive self-criticism & self-congratulation:

Key:

- 1 = Never true/ evident**
- 2 = seldom true/evident**
- 3 = occasionally true/evident**
- 4 = usually true/evident**
- 5 = consistently true/evident**

- | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Are you content or satisfied with how much Scripture you know? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Do you think you are ignorant when comes to Scripture? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Are you able to explain <i>what</i> you believe? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Are you able to explain <i>why</i> you believe what you believe? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Have you ever fully read the doctrinal statement of <i>your</i> local church? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Do you <i>understand</i> the doctrinal statement of your local church? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Do you ever try to cover up your ignorance of God's Word when challenged? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Are you able to discern the difference between true and false teaching? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Are your theological convictions well established? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Are you easily swayed when challenged theologically? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Do you think carefully and deeply about what you believe? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Are you able to do discern and consistently do the will of God? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Do you long to know Jesus Christ? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Are you able to <i>accurately</i> substantiate what you believe? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Do you easily get discouraged when biblically/theologically challenged? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Do you know who the key figures are in church history? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Can you outline the history or heritage of your denomination? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Do you care to know the great historic creeds of the Christian church? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. Can you succinctly state the fundamental beliefs of your faith? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. If a mother or father, do you teach your children the Bible? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. Do you have a plan to teach your children the Bible at home? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. Are your teenagers able to communicate <i>what</i> they believe and <i>why</i> ? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. Do set aside time each day to study (not merely read) the Scriptures? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24. Do you use any reference tools to assist you in the daily study of Scripture? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25. Do you long, crave, and yearn to know the God of the Bible? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26. Do you find joy in the personal discovery of studying the Scripture? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 27. Have you set aside a certain time to study the Scripture each & every day? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 28. Can you give arguments that support the fact that God exists? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29. Can you defend the reliability of Scripture? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30. Can you defend the factual historicity of Jesus Christ? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31. Can you outline the end-time events that are yet to come? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 32. Do you even know <i>how</i> to methodically, inductively study the Scripture? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |

33. Have you ever asked your pastor what books, authors, or figures in biblical and theological studies that have most impacted his life?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
34. When you read the Scriptures, do you read to read or <i>read to understand</i> ?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
35. Do you earnestly pray to God that you may intimately know Him?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
36. Do you most often study the Scriptures when you are sleepy or tired?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
37. Do you seek to use all the spiritual resources God has given you in the Bible?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
38. Do you apply the Scriptures meaningfully to your daily life?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
39. Have you created a personal plan/goals to better know God's Word?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
40. Do you find yourself ever embarrassed or ashamed because you don't know the Scriptures when asked a biblical or theological question?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Total:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO DIFFERENTLY IN VIEW OF THIS ASSESSMENT?

Here are some potential suggestions:

1. Go to my pastor and ask him to create a personal plan of study.
2. Find a local chapter of *Bible Study Fellowship* if my church is unwilling to teach me how to methodically, carefully, and deeply study the Scripture.
3. Ask a godly and learned person in my local church of the same gender to disciple me.
4. Find out and study the most impacting books in the history of the Christian church.
5. Pray everyday to God that you would have an unquenchable passion to know Him as disclosed in the Scripture.
6. Establish personal goals of study which you will purposefully accomplish for the next twelve months.
7. Create a place to study the Scripture that is aesthetically pleasing.
8. Adjust your schedule whereby you will meditate on God's Word fully awake and physically renewed.
9. Find out what are the best reference tools to assist me in study the Scripture.
10. Find a Bible college, Christian University, seminaries, or lay-institutes which offer Christ-centered, Bible-centered biblical, theological, and apologetic studies to better equip you.
11. Find out how to inductively study the Scripture. Consider purchasing Howard Hendrick's *Living by the Book*.
12. Find a group of Christian believers who will motivate you to know both *what* and *why* you believe what you believe, with a desire to know and maximize your life for His glory.