

# Consensus

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Volume 32  
Issue 2 *Cultural Reception of the Gospel*

Article 6

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5-1-2008

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### Recommended Citation

Bosch, Paul (2008) "Knowledge, love, power ," *Consensus*: Vol. 32: Iss. 2, Article 6.

DOI: 10.51644/TUBG7495

Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol32/iss2/6>

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## Knowledge, Love, Power

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### **Text: Ephesians 3: 14-21**

Here's a quote for you, from St. Augustine (he's very quotable, like Luther): "All truth is from God."

I think that's liberating, freeing, emancipating to your conscience. He's saying that if it's true, then it's from God. We don't have to fear where truth will lead us. If it's true, then it will lead you to God, not away from God.

So in today's second Reading the Apostle prays for his readers – that was the Ephesians originally, but that's us today – that we may have the power to comprehend the breadth and length and depth of God's mysteries in the Spirit.

That's *knowledge*. Paul prays knowledge for you. That's the first of the Spirit's gifts: knowledge.

Elsewhere Paul says, I want you to grow up in faith, not be like children with no discernment, but like grown-ups, full maturity. I call this specially to your attention because we are living in an age where a kind of baby-faith is glorified, and where knowledge is feared. Yes, Jesus says we are to enter the Kingdom like little children. But there's a difference between child-like and childish. The first is good, and the second is not-so-good.

Take Bible interpretation. Paul wants for you the gift of the power to comprehend what the Saints have left us in the words of the Bible. A big question today, a big problem today, is how you interpret the Bible. Martin Luther had such a free and liberating view of Bible interpretation. He knew what everybody knows who reads the Bible, that you can't take every word of the Bible with equal seriousness, with equal authority. Your God is a monster if you do that. Some words in the Bible are simply more authoritative for us, more important for us, than others. So Luther was very free in his own interpretation of the Bible. He thought the *Epistle of James* wasn't very good: an epistle of straw, he called it. And he thought the *Book*

of *Esther* in the Hebrew Bible is not very useful for faith; it tells a good story but that's about it.

Now, what's to be our standard, you ask, in ordering some parts of the Bible, prioritizing some parts of the Bible, as more important than others? (And everybody does this kind of thing. It's not just Luther, or Lutherans. Everybody ranks the Bible, one way or another. Yes, everybody thinks some parts of the Bible are more important than others.)

Luther's own standard was this: *Was Christum treibt*. That's Luther's native language, German. It means, "What drives Christ to you?" That's what's important in the Bible: What pushes Christ forward. What promotes Christ and the love of God as we know it in Christ. Real maturity. And that's why it's precious to us.

Along with a lot of stuff we can ignore today the Bible holds also a message of God's positive regard for us, a divine disposition of delight in the whole creation.

That brings me to the second noun here in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: *Love*. Paul wants us to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Knowledge is important. I don't think God wants us to remain babies in faith, but to mature in knowledge. But knowing the love of God in Jesus is even more important.

How about that story in the book Samuel, our first Reading (2 Samuel 11: 1-15)? Isn't David a scoundrel? He's setting up Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, to be killed in battle! That's terrible. Here's our hero, David, and he's acting like the Godfather; he's no better than Tony Soprano. David is doing a terrible thing here. I don't see the love of God in what David is doing. I do hear the love of God in the Psalms that bear David's name: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want* ...but not here. David is a villain here. There's nothing David does here that's worthy of our admiration, of being our example. David has to learn the meaning of the love of God.

This is last: Paul wants you *to be filled with all the fullness of God*. Wow! We don't hear that often enough, not even in Christian churches.

Another neat thing Luther says is this: We are to serve as Christs to one another. I am to be a Christ to you. You are to be a Christ to me. We are to be Christs to the world. I'll put that in even more startling terms: I am to be Messiah. You are to be Messiah for the world.

What else can it mean to be filled with God's own fullness?

That's what I take it to be, the meaning of the Spirit's gift to us: that

we have God in us. Do you want to see the Messiah? Then just look at your neighbour in the seat next to you. Or even this: look in the mirror.

That's surely part of the meaning of this Meal today: God wants to get into your molecules. Here's bread and wine. You eat. You drink. You digest. You metabolize. God wants to enter your very atoms and molecules.

Now there are some specific powers, some very distinctive authorities, that go along with being Messiah in the world. For example: Jews in Jesus' day believed that certain things would happen only when the Messiah came. When the Messiah came, justice would be achieved for God's favoured ones: the poor, the least, the lost, the last. When the Messiah came, women and children and gentiles – the uncircumcised! – would be welcomed with men into God's favour. When the Messiah came, sins would be forgiven. Only the Messiah could forgive sins.

Now here's Jesus, and he's saying, *I'm doing all that! And I'm giving my followers the power, the authority, to do all that, too! I'm welcoming the poor, the outcast, and eating and drinking with them. I'm welcoming women and children and the uncircumcised into God's favour. I'm forgiving sins. And I'm giving my followers the power, the authority, to do the same.*

So, for example: the day the Christian Church began to baptize instead of circumcise, on that day all the arguments against women's ordination were lost. All the arguments against women's leadership in the Church were lost when baptism took the place of circumcision.

Now there are a million other implications yet to be worked out among us if we really believe that we are to serve the world as Messiah as Jesus did, if we really believe we have that power, that authority, if we really believe that we are to be filled with the fullness of God. Among these implications are implications for our worship ... which is one reason why I've put the Table down here this morning. But let me leave it there ... and suggest that Christians still have a lot of homework to do in our wider society, and here at home in our own parish church.

Well, I have to quit.

Knowledge. Love. Power. Think about these gifts, and about what they may mean in your life during the rest of the week. And in the silence that follows.