

The Progression of Comprehension to Application

Everything alive has its order, just as 1Corinthians 15:36-38 explains. Order and progression is usually sequential and essential. Sequential progression is the concept that says each successive step of progression is predicated and built upon completion of the previous one. Babies learn to sit up first, then crawl, and then walk. Though there are exceptions to this order, they are called “exceptions” for a reason! Our comprehension and application of any acquired information follows this sequential progression process also. Let’s see how it works with comprehending and applying God’s Word....

Knowledge must come first. Knowledge, in this regard at least, must come first. We can’t *do* what we don’t first *know*. But at its initial state, this knowledge is rudimentary in that it is merely the accumulation of facts. These facts, however, are the building blocks for successive levels of comprehension. One cannot be made *free by the truth* unless it is first *known*, cf. John 8:31-32.

Understanding comes next. Understanding is realization of the association or correlation between these facts. A little girl was drilled on Abraham’s son being Isaac each week in bible class. She had it down pat, and could regurgitate “Isaac” each time she was asked who Abraham’s son was. But one time, the teacher asked who Isaac’s father was. The little girl had no clue. She had “knowledge” of some facts, but no “understanding” of exactly what those facts meant! The disciples were in a similar position after Jesus’ death. The Scriptures predicted, and He had told them multiple times, that He would *suffer, die, and be resurrected on the third day*, but “...as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead,” John 20:9. However, with additional time and instruction (cf. Luke 24:44-45), they came to *understand*, “Where therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken,” John 2:22.

Finally, wisdom understands how to apply knowledge- and does so. After basic knowledge has been acquired of the facts, and we have understood what those facts mean, then we can begin to properly (wisely) apply them to a given situation. Wisdom is knowledge applied through understanding. Let’s go back to the disciples/apostles to illustrate this point. After *understanding* allowed them to properly “see” and process the *knowledge* they had been given regarding the resurrection of Jesus, what came next? “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations- beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things,’” Luke 24:45-48. Once *knowledge* of the facts had been matured to/with *understanding*, *wisdom* was demonstrated by acting accordingly- they went out and lived, proclaimed, and explained what they *understood*, “And they went out and preached everywhere...” Mark 16:20.

Note the successive and sequential progression involved- *facts* first, then *understanding*, and finally, *wisdom* allows and prompts application. Simply put: We cannot *understand* what we do not *know*, nor can we *wisely apply* what we do not *understand*. Thus, the *wise words* of the proverbial writer are manifested, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding,” Proverbs 2:6.

What should these things mean to us? First, get *knowledge*- come to a “*the knowledge of the truth*,” 1Timothy 2:4. Second, gain *understanding*- learn not just what the truth says, but its *meaning*. Competent guides can be extremely helpful. Consider Nehemiah 8 in this regard: “And they read from the book, from the law of God, explaining to give

the sense so that they understood the reading," v.8; "Then on the second day the heads of the fathers households of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law," v.13; and then finally, when they knew what God had said, and gained understanding of what these things meant, they wisely obeyed, cf. vv.14-17! Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom (in application) is not only the necessary progression, it is the only way to get to where we need to be which is to not only "learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10), but to do it, James 1:22; 5:17! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)