QUESTION: What does 2 Timothy 3:7 mean when it says: “Always learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”?

ANSWER:
In 2 Timothy 3:1-9, Paul outlines the characteristics of people who will emerge in the last days—traits that will be prominent in the times leading up to Christ’s return. These traits are not just isolated behaviors but reflect a deeper spiritual condition. Paul warns that people will become increasingly selfish, cruel, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. These characteristics demonstrate a departure from genuine godliness.

The specific phrase in

> *2 Timothy 3:7—”always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”—*

refers to those who continually pursue knowledge, but it is shallow, self-serving, and ultimately leads them away from the true understanding of God’s will.

Let’s examine the verses carefully:

> *2 Timothy 3:5-9 (NIV):*
> *[5] “They have a form of godliness but deny its power. Have nothing to do with such people.”*
> *[6] “They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires,”*
> *[7] “always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*
> *[8] “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.”*
> *[9] “But they will not get very far, because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.”*

What Does “Knowledge” Mean?

The concept of “knowledge” in the Bible goes far beyond mere intellectual understanding or information. Knowledge (Greek: *epignosis*) in a biblical sense is a deep, intimate, and transformative understanding of God’s will and truth. This knowledge leads to a life that reflects God’s holiness, aligning

one’s actions with His purposes.

In the Old Testament, the word “knowledge” often describes an experiential understanding that comes from living in covenant relationship with God. For example, in

> *Hosea 4:6 (NIV), it is written:*
> *“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.”*

This shows that true knowledge of God is not just intellectual but is tied to obedience and relationship.

In the New Testament, epignosis refers to the knowledge that leads to godliness and transformation. This is why Paul can say in

> *Titus 1:1 (NIV):*
> *“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to*

> *further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness."*

True knowledge of God's truth is not merely for academic understanding but results in a transformed life that seeks to reflect God's character—especially His holiness.

The people in 2 Timothy 3:7 were always learning but never able to reach that deep, transformative knowledge of God's truth. They might have had an intellectual grasp of religious ideas, but their lives didn't demonstrate the practical holiness that should result from knowing Christ.

The Deception of a "Form of Godliness"

In 2 Timothy 3:5, Paul warns of people who "have a form of godliness but deny its power." This describes individuals who outwardly appear to be religious—they may speak Christian language, adopt Christian practices, and even hold positions in the church. However, their lives do not demonstrate the power of true godliness, which is the transformative effect of the Holy Spirit working in and through them.

This is echoed in

> *Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV), where Jesus warns that outward religious activity alone is not sufficient:*
> *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

This highlights a critical point: the power of godliness is not in outward rituals or intellectual knowledge but in the deep, personal relationship with Christ that leads to holiness and obedience.

True Knowledge: Holiness

So, what is this “true knowledge” that Paul refers to? True knowledge is godliness or holiness—it is the knowledge that transforms a person’s life, leading them to become more like Christ in their actions, attitudes, and values. The Bible makes it

clear that genuine knowledge of God will always lead to godliness, as seen in

> *Titus 1:1:*
> *“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.”*

This transformation is a hallmark of a true believer’s life—one that is being conformed to the image of Christ. Paul emphasizes this again in

> *Romans 12:2 (ESV):*
> *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

The Modern Parallel

This scenario is evident today. In many places, there is an overwhelming amount of biblical knowledge available. We have seminaries, online resources, Bible translations, and teachings that far exceed anything people in the past had access to. Yet, despite all this knowledge, many still fail to live lives that reflect the holiness of Christ. Knowledge is abundant, but the true transformation it should bring is often lacking.

As

> *2 Timothy 3:7 describes, people can be “always learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

This is a warning for us to reflect on our own spiritual journey. Are we truly allowing God’s truth to transform us into His image, or are we simply accumulating knowledge without real change?

A Personal Reflection: Have We Reached True Knowledge?

This should be a question we ask ourselves: Has our knowledge of God truly led us to holiness? In the last days, there is a danger of accumulating knowledge without allowing it to transform our

lives. Are our teachings and our lives reflecting the character of Christ? Are we pursuing holiness, as we are called to do in

> *1 Peter 1:16 (ESV):*
> *“Since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.'”*

As we continue in these last days, let us not fall into the trap of merely learning about God without truly knowing Him in a way that changes our hearts and actions. Let us pursue the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, as we follow Christ in holiness.

May the Lord bless you

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