

Experiencing God

Full Knowledge of God

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There was once a young man, just recently graduated from a fine school, and he was full of ideals and imagination. We will call him Sam. Sam dreamed of being a great and famous author, someone like Twain or Tolstoy or Dickens, an author who is internationally known and read, translated into many foreign languages, and loved universally by readers and critics alike. But he knew, being a young man who had not really broken into the industry at all, he would have to pay his dues. So he began casting about for work trying to find a job that would allow him time to write and perhaps even give him some experience in the craft, if he could find such a job.

After a few weeks of little success, he noticed a personal advertisement in a local newspaper. The advertisement sought a young man who could act as a personal secretary. The advertisement specifically stipulated that the applicant have considerable knowledge of literature and high proficiency in composition and grammar.

Now this job looked to be right up the young man's alley, and he was so excited that he immediately replied to the address in the advertisement (he did this by the morning post, right after breakfast), and the next day it brought a letter in return, requesting an interview the following afternoon.

Now the address that he had been given belonged to a stately house; it was not quite a mansion, but it was in the best part of the city. Seeing this, as he walked up, he was quite relieved that he had worn his best suit and tie as to make the best impression because obviously whoever owned this house, whoever had sent out the ad, was someone of means.

A butler ushered him into the finely appointed office furnished in all those nice things like hardwood, brass, and leather, as you would expect in a finely appointed office; and there, to his surprise, sitting behind the desk sat his boyhood idol—the famous and wealthy author whom he had always wanted to emulate. This was a dream come true or it would be a dream come true if he could only land this job.

The author (we will call him Arthur) gave him a warm smile, stood, and leaned across the massive desk to shake the young man's hand and to welcome him into his home and his workplace. Arthur was an older man now but his younger days had been a series of adventures that he had drawn upon to imbue his very engrossing books with

the feeling that his fiction had really happened; in fact, maybe it had and he had just written down his adventures. The newspapers spoke of Arthur in glowing terms and around town he was known for his charitable giving and his frequent lectures that he gave for free at the university. In all his experience and all his reading, Sam had never heard an unkind word about Arthur; everybody loved him, it seemed.

For Sam the interview was a smashing success. Arthur was thrilled when Sam told him that he had read his entire corpus of work and he knew it well. He nodded with approval upon learning that Sam yearned to be an author and took every spare moment to put pen to paper. He asked the young man to describe how he chose his subjects to write on, what his writing routine was, how much he edited and re-edited and rewrote, and rewrote again—such things that one author might ask another. Arthur seemed pleased with Sam's answers, and before long he had offered him the position which Sam eagerly accepted. Frankly, he would have done the job even if he had to work for free.

At first all went well. He soon learned his duties which consisted mostly of answering letters from fans and keeping Arthur's schedule of appearances. On occasion he was asked to read parts of Arthur's latest book that he was working on, and he was asked to make minor edits—ones that jumped out at him—and note any errors in continuity in the story. It was work that he loved; he would do it all day.

But that was at the beginning. As time wore on, Sam found out that Arthur was the poster boy, as it were, for the adage "familiarity breeds contempt." The more Arthur worked with Sam, the more sour and critical he became of the young man, telling him that he had "little ideas and little skill" and "he would be lucky to sell any of his stories even to the pulp industry." Of course, this was devastating to Sam.

On top of the criticism, Arthur became more demanding, flogging him verbally for not answering enough letters and not booking enough personal appearances for him. He docked Sam's pay for showing up late one day and refused to listen to his explanation which Sam felt was quite a legitimate one (he had been helping someone). Sam could not even stay home ill without being berated for leaving Arthur in the lurch.

Within the span of a year, Sam's dream job disintegrated into a disillusioning daily slog. He did not even want to go in any more. So finally he could take no more. He tendered his resignation and never again read another word of Arthur's work.

Depressing, is it not?

Though his experience could have been much, much better, Sam's story is a sad and

disappointing one. From all he had heard, Arthur was a wonderful, engaging, endearing person. But that was merely a mask for the real Arthur. The real Arthur was a selfish, critical, spiteful, and plain mean old man.

Now, fortunately, the story that I just told you is entirely fiction; I made it up. But it does illustrate a principle that I would like to expound today, and that is: True knowledge comes only from experience.

II Peter 1:1-3 Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.

II Peter 1:5-8 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us go to chapter 3 and pick up the last verse in the book:

II Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Now if we take these verses—there are about eight or nine of them—together as a passage, the word ‘knowledge’ appears six times in these verses that we have read—five times in the first little section in chapter 1 and again in chapter 3.

Now the words that are used here for knowledge are obscured here by our English word knowledge because it is not always the same word, which makes it confusing. It would have been nice if they had put a different word in there so we knew we are actually talking about a different Greek word.

In II Peter 1:2, 3, 8, and II Peter 3:18 the Greek word is *epignosis*. This word does not mean just knowledge. When the Greeks put a preposition in front of a word like this and

made it a compound word, it changed the meaning. *Epignosis* means not just knowledge but precise and correct knowledge. You could say “true and precious knowledge.” It was something more than just knowledge. The preposition *epi* implies over or upon; it can also even be above.

So what it is saying here...if you say it is the over-knowledge or it is knowledge upon something, a greater knowledge, or even the knowledge that is above normal knowledge, you can kind of get the idea of what Peter is trying to get across, here. He is talking about a knowledge that is greater than ordinary knowledge.

So we can take it down, if we wanted to define it, to this: The knowledge that Peter is talking about is full and transcendent knowledge because of the way he puts it; it is the knowledge of God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ in these particular things. “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” He is talking about a full and transcendent knowledge that only Christ or God can reveal to us through the Holy Spirit. He is talking about a knowledge that is different. It could be even called a holy knowledge. Transcendent Knowledge is a good way of putting it. It is beyond what an ordinary normal person can understand.

Sometimes, in different translations, this word—*epignosis*—is translated as acknowledgment, which is an interesting way of putting it. It is also translated as recognition, which I find also to be interesting to think of it this way. But it is knowledge that is recognized only by special people who have been given the knowledge, only the people who are able to understand this knowledge can acknowledge it. Otherwise it passes them by. Because of this, this word has also been translated as discernment, because only those who are given a special power can discern this knowledge. Otherwise you remain ignorant of it.

In each case, then, it suggests something beyond mere knowledge. If you want to call it anything, we can call it knowledge plus. I probably will not use that again but it is an interesting way of putting it; we talk about “service plus” and all these things that people try to do to make themselves stand out that it is going to be better than what you would get elsewhere. Peter is talking about “knowledge plus.”

In II Peter 1:5, however, it is the simple term *gnosis*. That is what we add to our virtue; first you have faith; you add virtue to that, and then you add knowledge, it says, here. It is just simply the word *gnosis*; and *gnosis* was the general term for knowledge in the Greek language. It is general knowledge that you can learn on your own. It is the things that anybody can learn if they want to, as long as they apply themselves and look for it diligently.

So Peter is saying, here in verse 5, that once we become Christians, we show our faith by believing God, turning to Him, repenting, and coming into His family; and then we put on virtue which is actually courage—we are courageous enough to live this way. We start putting on the virtues of Christ and then we are supposed to keep on growing in knowledge; we are supposed to be adding knowledge to this. We are not just to say, “Oh, I have finally arrived. God has accepted me into His family. I can quit.” No, Peter says you are supposed to be adding to your faith moral goodness, and you are supposed to be adding to your faith knowledge—helpful knowledge.

So, in context, Peter is most likely suggesting biblical things; you are supposed to learn biblical knowledge; you are supposed to be studying your Bible; you are supposed to be trying to understand what it is all about and grow in that because Peter does say at the very end “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” even though that is *epignosis* (we will not be so picky), but Peter is telling us through the entire book that we are supposed to be growing in knowledge.

But it does not have to be confined to biblical things. There is knowledge that we can learn from the world that can be helpful knowledge as well. People out there have ideas that we can use to our benefit. It does not mean that their ideas are sanctioned by God at all, but they may be good ideas. Remember, this world is a mixture of the knowledge of good and evil. So we have to learn how to strain out the evil and take away the good that we can. It might be difficult but there is knowledge out there that we can use.

What Peter is talking about here is knowledge in general: any kind of learning, any kind of knowledge, any kind of information that helps us grow and mature as Christians. We are to be adding that in as we continue along the journey to the Kingdom of God. God does not want a bunch of dummies in His Kingdom. He wants us to continue to educate ourselves, to learn and grow and expand in what we know and what we can do.

Now my point here in all of this is to show that Peter is dealing with two connected but different kinds of knowledge. It is not just *gnosis*, it is also *epignosis*. The first, as we have seen, is general knowledge and in the biblical sense it is good and helpful information. So we want to continue to grow in knowledge. Anyone with intelligence and some desire for it can gain this kind of knowledge simply by diligent study, simply by keeping his eyes and ears open and adding to his fund of knowledge.

In fact, many professing Christian preachers and commentators have this knowledge to a high degree. You can read the Bible and know an awful lot and be able to make connections between things. That is what commentators have done. They have studied it to such an extent that they have learned a great deal of knowledge from the Bible.

This is the kind of knowledge, we could say, that is available to the spirit in man generally.

Remember, in I Corinthians 2 God says that He gave the spirit in man to be able to understand things that can be physically discerned. So what we read and what we hear and that sort of thing can be learned by people. This book is not necessarily closed; it is open to anybody who wants to read it, and they can get a great deal of knowledge out of it.

That does not mean they are going to understand it as God wants them to understand it because that takes the application of the Spirit of God. But if they want to, they could have the *gnosis* of God's Word and very deeply. They can know it from cover to cover, backward, forward; they can recite verses to you; they can say that this verse and this verse go together and they help form a principle. They can do that because it is *gnosis*; it is knowledge. If they are smart enough, diligent enough, and can put things together, they can come up with it. So that is *gnosis*—the first one that Peter is talking about.

But we need to go back to *epignosis*. *Epignosis* is spiritual knowledge that comes to a Christian by virtue of his connection to Christ by the Holy Spirit. This is the knowledge that Paul is describing in I Corinthians 2, wherein he says that we can understand the deep things of God by His Spirit—those are things that people without God's Spirit have no idea about and can never learn.

No amount of intellect, of putting things together by hook or by crook, can they come up with this. It just will not work because it is spiritually discerned. People do not like this word, but it is exclusive, special knowledge. It is a kind of revelation that people who are uncalled—we will call them the unregenerate—cannot obtain, no matter how much they want to spend on it, no matter how much time they want to spend on it.

It is like Simon Magus. He was beseeching Peter to give him this Spirit, and he offered him money and Peter said, "No way! Be gone with you. We do not want to see you. You do not have the right spirit." He did not and he could not have this Spirit, because he did not have the right attitude. God had really not called him. He was not one of the elect; he was cut off from God, and God would not allow him to understand these things. Of course, he wanted the power that was manifested through the Spirit.

It works the same way in terms of knowledge. It is the *epignosis* that we want, that transcendent knowledge, that spiritual knowledge that only comes through the Holy Spirit of God.

Now we should not think of *epignosis*, or of God giving us the *epignosis* by His Spirit, as some sort of hocus-pocus thing. It does not come to us in a flash in a 500 gigabyte download into our brains. That is not the way it works.

When the minister puts his hands on you, and he asks God to give you the Holy Spirit, after baptism, anybody can ask you two minutes later, “Do you know more now than you did?” and you would have to say, “No, not really,” because there is no flash, “Oh, now I understand.”

It is not like Neo in *The Matrix* calling up, “Hey, I need to know how to fly a helicopter,” and they downloaded it into his cerebral cortex, and he suddenly goes, “Hey, there it is. Okay!” and he knows all the controls and off he goes. It is not like that. It is not instantaneous. That is not how *epignosis* works. It is not a direct download into the brain. It is downloaded to the brain at some point, but there is much more to it than that.

Let us go to John 17, a familiar scripture, in verse 3. We are going to see a little bit about how this works. I am just going to pick up this one verse. I know you probably know it pretty much by heart. Jesus is praying for His disciples and He is giving that final prayer before He is arrested. He says:

John 17:3 And this is eternal life:...

Now He is giving us the definition here. “This is eternal life:”

John 17:3 ...that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

So I have this marked in my Bible with a ‘D’ and a triangle around it. It is my little marking system that I put in my Bible for a definition scripture. I would have probably told you this before. I love definition scriptures because they nail things down so beautifully.

Jesus is defining eternal life here, and He defines it as knowing the Father and the Son. Did you catch that?—knowing the Father and the Son. It is a similar word to *gnosis* and *epignosis*; it is in the same family—to know—in the Greek. So we understand this.

Let us go back a couple of chapters to John 14, because Jesus had actually been talking about knowing for a long time throughout a lot of this sermon He gave them.

John 14:6 was just after Thomas asked, “How do you get there? We do not know the way.”

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Now a lot of times we stop right there because our Bibles put a gap there because it is a new section, they say, a new paragraph, and so we kind of stop and forget about it, and then we go on to what the next passage is about. But let us understand that the text actually does not stop there in the original, in the Greek. It just keeps on going because the conversation is continuing to take place. So let us read it again without the stop.

John 14:6-7 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.”

Now He had been saying that He was the way, the truth, and the life. And then He says, “If you had known Me...” He is saying, in effect, that they should have known the way, the truth, and the life which was Him—those things that encompass what He is.

John 14:7 If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also, and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.

He is saying that you know the way, you know the truth, you know the life because you have experienced it with Him because He is that. He is everything we need to know.

John 14:8-9 Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

Now these verses that we have just read (John 17:3 and John 14:6 through 9) are about this kind of knowledge, the *epignosis* knowledge. *Epignosis*, if you want to draw it down to its finest or the best point, is knowing God. The *epignosis* that we need to understand, that transcendent knowledge, is all about God. Jesus says that eternal life is knowing the Father and the Son. As we have learned, the phrase “to know” means more than

appears on the outside or on the surface.

We can say that we know many people. We know hundreds of people. On Facebook we have hundreds of friends, and we know them so well. Some of them may be lifelong friends; maybe we have known them thirty, forty, fifty years; others we have met only once. On Facebook some friends you may never have met at all, and all that you know is their name, and maybe a little bit more about them.

We even say that we know people that we have never met and hardly know anything about. What we mean when we say that we know them is that we know about them; we know that they exist. We may know a few little facts about them.

Do you know Tiger Woods? "Oh sure, yeah." But lately he has been known for his infidelities rather than for his birdies. But have you ever shaken his hands? Have you ever seen him in person? Well, I have, at the Wachovia Tournament when he came through. But that is about it. You know, he is just an African-American guy walking by with a golf club. I never really knew him. I just knew of him, knew that he could play golf really well at one point; actually he did win the last tournament on the PGA Tour.

That is how it is. We say we know celebrities. We say we know people that we might have heard about but we really do not know them; we just know a few little facts about them. We might be able to recognize their picture wherever we may have seen them, but we really do not more specifically know about them.

But that is not what Jesus means when He says that eternal life is to know the Father and the Son. He does not mean "to know about them." Obviously, knowing about them is a part of it, but that is not what He is emphasizing. He spoke these words to His disciples either in Hebrew or Aramaic, and so He was reaching back into the Old Testament for a Hebraism.

To know is a Hebraism. If we had time, we could march through the Old Testament and show lots of places where it talks about a man knowing his wife, and you know the next sentence says "And he had a son or a daughter." I am glad they got to know each other. But that is not what it means.

Knowing or to know was a Hebraism that was a euphemism in that language. A euphemism is a good or acceptable term that is used in place of one that people would rather avoid. So they used a euphemism "to know" to stand in for the act of sexual intercourse. They did not want to put in there, there might be children in the room, so they said, "Adam knew his wife Eve and she bore Cain and then she bore Abel." So to

know, as a euphemism, implies the most intimate of relationships, and the most intimate of human relationships is that of a husband and wife.

So Jesus reaches back into the Old Testament and pulls this term forward as His definition for eternal life, but is He desexualizes the term while leaving the intimacy, the closeness, of the relationship intact. So He is no longer talking about sex, but He is talking about the closeness of a relationship, like that between a husband and wife. Do you know what He said about a husband and wife back in Genesis 2? They became one flesh.

And so the image then of to know means that they are absolutely and totally unified in an intimate relationship. They are one. That is how close the relationship is. It has gone past them being separate and seen as two. Now they are so closely together, so in-sync, with one another that they can be seen as one, which is the same relationship the Father has with the Son.

Is that not what the Shema says in Deuteronomy 6? It says there is one God. They are unified so much that one is just like the other. Do you know what Jesus says here? Eternal life is to be drawn into that oneness, into that intimate, personal, unified relationship.

Then we have John 14 (that was just John 17:3 we were talking about). I went back to John 14 because I wanted to draw in another fact. As a matter of fact, He put this factor first, but I wanted it second because I wanted us to understand how close the relationship is from John 17:3. It is knowledge that is so close that it is one. Our personalities meld together, our character melds together, and you can hardly tell one from the other.

Back in John 14, though, He is talking about how this happens. He adds another element to the mix that makes all the difference. Of course, he says in John 14, verse 7 that the Father and the Son are so much alike—that element is there in chapter 14. But the new element that He adds, here, is in the question that He asks Philip, in verse 9. Notice what He said to him: “Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known me, Philip?”

What is the factor? What is the new factor that Jesus added to knowing God?

Time.

“Have I been with you so long, Philip, and you do not know Me?” Time. Time is critical to

this process, and here we know that with Philip it was three-and-a-half years. It was not just a week-and-a-half or something. If it had been, He would say, "*Why, I have only been with You a week-and-a-half. How am I supposed to know what You are like?*" But he had no excuse because it had been three-and-a-half years. He had seen Him in all kinds of situations; he had seen him work so many miracles; he had seen Him give so many sermons; he had seen Him do marvelous miraculous things; he had seen Him raise people from the dead, calm a storm. He had no excuse because he had had time with God in the person of Jesus Christ.

So you look at the disciples and they saw all this. We would kill almost to have had their experience [I am being facetious; that would break a commandment). But you look at the record that has been left of the way they were over those three-and-a-half years, and you sometimes say, "What? Do you not understand who this is?" Some of their answers are ridiculous, like they did not know at all what was going on; and they probably did not. But you would think, "Man, I would have got the right answer if He had asked me that question."

So you wonder where they had been all that time; you know, were they reading a book; downloading stuff from their Kindle or whatever; not paying attention? It seems like even after three years they hardly knew Him at all. They could barely answer one of His questions. They could not get beyond a point.

Of course, at this point, the Holy Spirit had not been given to them but they had Christ Himself there; He is that Holy Spirit, He could have given them all the information they wanted. But they just were not as close to Him as they should have been, even after three-and-a-half years.

But the point remains that what Jesus shows here in John 14 is that we have to take the time God has given us to get to know Him because, as I said before, it is not going to be downloaded in a flash. The *epignosis* that we come to know is something that is given to us over many years, decades, an entire lifetime.

Epignosis comes from spending time with God.

The marriage relationship is a good example again of this because that is what Jesus bases His definition of eternal life on; it is the marriage relationship. When we were young and we just had gotten married, we think we know everything there is to know about our spouse. We have looked him or her up and down and we have talked and talked into the small hours of the night; and we know all these things. We have done so many things with them.

Then our first major trial... It could be anything; it could be a traffic accident, or she ruined the car, or maybe it is the loss of a job, or something tragic like a miscarriage or serious illness of one or the other, or maybe the death of a beloved family member, or something like that, something that stops life for a moment. And you look at the other person, and maybe he or she is having a convulsion fit, and you never knew this person would do stuff like that.

Major stress causes a partner to act in ways that did not come out before whatever it happens to be. So, as a husband, you walk around the house on egg shells for a while; you are kind and considerate or try to be understanding; try to be absent as much as possible. This occurs until you figure things out. The person that you thought you knew so well is more complex than you ever gave him or her credit for, in that there are just some situations that bring out different bits of the personality or character in another person.

It does not mean at all that you have fallen out of love with this person. You are committed to the marriage; it is a wonderful thing; you want to spend the rest of your life with this person, warts and all. But it simply means that we recognize or we acknowledge—remember these terms for *epignosis*—or we discern a new facet in the other person's personality, a new facet of their character, that has come out. What we do with that; we do not just lump it and say, "I am done," which too many people do. We say, "Okay, I am going to put that together with what I already know about my lovely bride (or about my husband, from a woman's perspective), and we start seeing the person in a much fuller, more complete way.

It may take a while for us to process this new person that we are living with, but over time we come to understand the person has this facet, this aspect, to his or her personality that we did not know about before; but it is fine. Next time something big comes up, and he or she reacts like that, we will know that this is how he or she is. So we add knowledge upon knowledge and that adding of knowledge upon knowledge fills out the picture more completely. So we know them even better, and because we know them better, we can actually react to them better. We can even pre-empt some of these things because we know that that is how it is.

So *epignosis* is knowledge that transcends what you knew before, what you could find out about the person, because it has come through experience; it was not something that was in her *Curriculum Vitae* or whatever that is it is called, or maybe even a personality test. It is not something that was there that you could find out. You could only find it out in time and experience because a situation occurred that brought it out.

So, getting back to God, this was only an illustration of our living with God over time. It is our experiential knowledge of God that rounds out our Christian education. The Bible is a wonderful, fascinating, fact-filled book, you might say; there is a principle and a lesson on every page, almost every verse, you might say. But there are still things we cannot learn about God from the Book. That is why we have the Holy Spirit, and that is why God gives us time, after we are converted, because He has got a lot to teach us, and He is only going to be able to teach us this *epignosis* by circumstance, by taking us down the path, hopefully merrily, to the Kingdom of God.

But we know that usually the path to the Kingdom of God, being narrow and the gate strait—it is not going to be easy. So what we need to do is understand that things are going to go along on this path; we are going to walk it with God, but there are going to be obstacles and other things that come our way, as we go down the path, where we are going to learn a great deal about God and how He reacts to things, and He is going to learn a great deal about us and the way we react to things. Then, because of the way we react to things, He is going to throw more obstacles in our path because there are things we need to learn.

But the goal is to take us through that strait gate and get us into the Kingdom. The goal is to know Him and Jesus Christ, His Son, to the point that when somebody looks at us they see Him; and when they see Him, they see us because we are so much like Him that you can hardly see a difference. Now that is a very high goal, but it is in the Book.

Before we go there, before I give up where that is, please turn to I Corinthians 2. I have mentioned this before, but I want to go through it a little bit more fully. Just keep in mind that it is our experiential knowledge of God that rounds out our Christian education. It is our experiential knowledge that becomes *epignosis*. It is the way He teaches us the things we need to know that He cannot teach us through words.

I Corinthians 2:12-16 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

I want to go through this verse by verse and just give you an idea of what Paul was getting at here. I think this is a fascinating passage when we consider it in terms of experiential knowledge—*epignosis*.

In verse 12, Paul is saying that God has given us His Spirit that we might recognize or discern what He has given us. That is what he says there: "...that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." What this tells us is that we cannot know the blessings that God gives us, the gifts that God gives us, the knowledge that God gives us, et cetera—whatever God gives us—we cannot know the scope and a lot of the specifics unless we have His Spirit.

Now we can say, "Oh, God gives us our daily bread," "God puts the oxygen in the atmosphere," "God gives us water to drink," "God puts the clothes on our backs," "He gives us a job." We can understand all those little things; they are not little things. I should not have used that word; they are big things. He gives us life. He has made all of this available to us. We can reap the bounty of all the blessings that He has put on this earth. But these are things that can be physically discerned.

The Spirit of God gives us an ability to see His blessings beyond that, things that other people cannot see because they do not have His Spirit. We do not truly appreciate and recognize all His blessings, especially the personal ones, the ones that come to us specifically, except by experiencing those blessings throughout our lives. We would not know that God had opened up a door to us unless He showed us by His Spirit that He had done so, because we went through it with Him. We experienced it.

So what he is saying in verse 12 is that God's Spirit reveals those blessings to us, and without the Spirit we would remain ignorant of them. I am not just talking about physical blessings. I am talking about mostly the spiritual blessings that cannot be discerned by someone who does not have God's Spirit. Someone who does not have God's Spirit cannot see your growth. They cannot see the things you have overcome. They cannot see how God has worked with you in the stillness of the night in your prayers or whatever, in your crying to Him for help. And you, having experienced those cries and prayers to Him, know when they are answered. It is only the Holy Spirit that gives you the ability to see Him working. Otherwise it just looks like a coincidence and stuff like that.

He says here in verse 13, which I mentioned before, that this knowledge—the *epignosis*—that we receive by the Holy Spirit does not come in words. It comes in experiences. It comes in doing things and experiencing things with God. Now we may eventually put those things in words to tell other people and help them along, but to us,

personally, the communication is through recognition and acknowledgement (there are those words again) of God's involvement in our lives—very similar to what this last one was, but this one is specifically not in words, it is in experiences.

So, it is the question my dad brought up in his signature sermon: “Do you see God?”

Your level of *epignosis* depends on how well you see Him in the events of your life. If you do not see God working in your life, you are not receiving this further knowledge, you are not receiving the transcendent knowledge of God. The Spirit is not working in you probably because you are not working with it.

I do not want to be a downer, here, but it is probably a good idea that we really take careful note or set aside time to see God at work within our lives, and to acknowledge it, to thank Him for it, and to really begin to set our minds in a pattern of seeing Him at work. This is going to take a measure, a use, of the Holy Spirit because without it, it cannot be seen. You are going to have to use faith, you are going to have to trust Him, and you are going to have to ask Him to make these things plain. That should greatly enhance our faith, once we begin seeing God at work in our lives more fully.

Paul says here in verse 14 that your unconverted friends and family members will not share your joy of God's involvement in your life because they think you are either a fool or you are cracked—you are crazy to think that God could be involved in your life. “Who do you think you are?” “How would He be concerned about you?” “Who are you anyway?” “You still live in a trailer” or “You still live with your mom” or what have you. Your friends and family are not going to think that these revelations from God through His Spirit are really there. They will think that you are just making them up.

So do not give much credence to what they think about you. That is just the bottom line. Do not care. Do not care about what they think about you and your claims of God's involvement in your life. They are, by God's choice, simply unable to discern what is going on. They cannot. That is just the way it is. Let them laugh at you about what you are doing and the way you are going. They are spiritually clueless. Their opinions are essentially worthless when it comes to going the way of God. So do not let them discourage you. If God is working with you, you are somebody; and if you can recognize that and use it by coming closer to God, then you are going places. Do not let them drag you back.

The apostle says there in verse 15 that a person who is led by God's Spirit judges or discerns all things. That is, if you are really being led by God's Spirit, you are going to see everything through the lens of God's revelation. You are not going to look on these

things physically; you are going to look on these things spiritually. You are going to be in training to see things through God's eyes. Now Paul is talking about those who do this the best. They are going to see all things in terms of God's light, and God's mind. We are trying to get to that point. So we are in exercises, you may say, to coming to have this perspective of seeing everything from God's point of view.

So a person who is in the Spirit of God, who is truly spiritual, is going to look at life and the experiences of life and the people of this world far differently than the average Joe will. So his actions and his reactions are going to run counter to what the people in the world—even families and friends—would do. Everything is going to be different. If he is judging things on God's standards, that is way different from the way in this world.

So Paul says, again, that we should not be too concerned about what they think of us. He says he is rightly judged by no one, meaning they do not judge you properly at all, and so do not worry about it. Do not worry about what other people think of what you do and how you see the world. Think about what the Judge thinks about you and how you see the world.

So, in a way, you could think of the Holy Spirit being a great burden putting you into such a different category, and you are so weird compared to the rest of the world that Paul says, *"That is not the way you are supposed to think of God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Do not worry about what they think. Just follow God. Look at things through His eyes and do what you are supposed to do. Do not be concerned about them. They will get their chance someday."*

Now, of course, this always ends up putting us under the light of persecution and that sort of thing, but that is part of the narrow way. So just put them out of your mind, in terms of them having any influence on the way you look at life. They are not your judges.

Finally, verse 16. What this *epignosis* is doing is building within us the mind and character of Christ. That is his final word there. What this experiential knowledge of God is doing is making us like God and Christ as much as we humanly can. It is making us one with Him. It brings us into a fuller recognition of what He is and what He does; how He plans; like David Grabbe said in the CGG Weekly yesterday (June 8, 2012); how He waits; how He thinks; how He speaks; how He does this, how He does that; how He reacts to this, how He reacts to that. We are having these experiences with Him in our lives, and we are supposed to be learning about Him as well as about us, as we go through them.

I think most of us are focused on ourselves and how we react to these things. But do we take the time to stop and think how God worked in all of these things? Then we can come to a greater understanding of what He is like. So if we follow His lead, if we are building knowledge upon knowledge to the point of *epignosis* through our experience with Him, we are—at the end of it all—going to be like Him. We will see Him as He is. Do you remember that scripture, I John 3:2? Is that not eternal life (John 17:3) to be like Him? That is what John says it will be like in the Kingdom of God.

When Christ appears, we are going to see Him as He is, and we will be just like Him. That is the goal.

Now it is probably going to take a resurrection before we get anywhere close to that, but that is what we are working toward. We are working toward being one with Him. We have learned the knowledge, and we are continuing to learn the knowledge—the *gnosis*. Now we are continuing *epignosis* through our experiences with Him and that is really what is going to make us like Him, make us one with Him, make us united with Him, and make people see Him and us.

Think about this for a minute from an example—a person. We all know him and love him. He lived at the time of the book of Genesis. His name is Abraham. I mentioned him in the last sermon. I mentioned him in the context of him not having much knowledge—*gnosis*. He is the father of the faithful though—the one “who believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Now he did not have a great deal of knowledge. He certainly could not have studied the Bible. Abraham is spoken of in Genesis 12; that is when his story begins. So the only part of the Bible that he could possibly have had access to was Genesis 1 through 11, as far as we understand. It is a good supposition that he had that. He had all the records of what had happened before the flood. They were passed down to him from Noah and Shem, and he probably had traditions or stories that had been passed down in the family of God working with Noah and Shem and the things that they did. Perhaps that included certain parts of His law and His commandments. He certainly knew about clean and unclean meats because that was something that God had done in the Ark; there were seven of each clean animal. So that was certainly there. Of course, he had the understanding that Cain killed Abel and that was bad; so he had the sixth commandment, obviously. And there were others that came down. So he had some knowledge.

But it certainly was not Pauline by any stretch of the imagination. He did not have the great books of Moses to refer to. He did not have the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah,

Ezekiel, Daniel, and all the Minor Prophets. He did not have the works of David throughout the Psalms. He did not have all these examples of people in the historical books, of doing good things and bad things. He did not have a great deal of *gnosis* that we can read out of Scripture.

So we could say that compared to you and me, his technical and doctrinal knowledge, his *gnosis* was sparse, slim.

But he is the father of the faithful, not us. We do not have that title, he does. He had something that we do not have. God personally visited him on several occasions. He spoke to him; they ate at least one meal together or at least Abraham watched Him eat; and Abraham felt close enough to God that after that meal, he felt that he could bargain with God for the life of Lot, and he got them down to just a few people.

He was called by God at age 75. He was already a fairly old man, and he lived another 100 years as a converted person. So he had a lot of time with God. He had a lot of experiences along the way with God, and I am sure that the ones we have in the Bible are just the highlights. There were a lot more things that happened in Abraham's life other than Ishmael being born and Hagar being thrown out, and then this and that and the other thing, and Abimelech and Pharaoh and what not. Those were just some of the big things that happened in his life that he had 100 years of walking with God, of experiencing life with God. In Genesis 26:5, after Abraham is dead, God says to Isaac, "Isaac, your father obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." That was His summary of the life of Abraham.

Now Abraham was not a perfect man by any means. He made mistakes. He was a pretty good liar, it seems; and he was a little bit hen-pecked by Sarah when he should have known better. But what happened there started this feud between Ishmael and Isaac, and it is still going on. Maybe had Abraham done something a little better at the time, it would not have happened; maybe there would have been harmony. But, no, he made a mistake.

Over time—remember he had 100 years—he learned to trust God, and the epitome of this was that he trusted God to the point of taking Isaac to Mount Moriah and holding the knife over his neck to sacrifice him. So over the experiences of that long life, seeing God at work beside him the whole way, he came to know God and to be like Him to the point that the apostle Paul says that he is our example among humans of how to be, how to walk with God. He is the father of the faithful.

James writes:

James 2:21-22 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

We could say, putting it another way, that over the experiences of his life and his proper reactions to them, he came to have a great deal of *epignosis* and became just like God. His faith was made perfect.

James 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.

That is how close they were. They were intimate friends. You know what, Jesus says that about us. He says, “I no longer call you servants but friends.” That is the intimacy we are supposed to have with Him through the Holy Spirit so that we come to know Him and trust Him.

Galatians 5:25 says, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” In other words, if the Spirit of God dwells in you, if we have been made alive by the Spirit of God, conduct your life by its guidance—by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If God has given you His Spirit, use it. The Holy Spirit not only links us to God but it helps us to do godly things, and it teaches us all the things that we need to know. Is it not what Jesus told us the Spirit of truth would do? It would come and reveal to us all things, meaning all things that pertain to life and godliness. It is in the doing—the living with God, the walking with God—that we come to a full knowledge of Him and His truth.

Let us conclude in Matthew 25. I want to put in you the fear of God as we end. Matthew 25, in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

Matthew 25:6-12 And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

And so Jesus then says to us:

Matthew 25:13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

I find verse 12 to be very significant. Jesus says to these people who have to remain outside the wedding feast that He does not know those who ran out of oil. He does not know them. They have no relationship. They are not close, not at all. He can barely recognize them. They were not His friends, so they were not allowed into the wedding feast. They had not been intimates of His. They had not been living under His guidance, by His Spirit. They had run out. He and they had had little or no experience of each other and so Jesus could not trust them; unlike Abraham, of whom he said after his near-sacrifice of Isaac, "Now I know that you fear God".

So Jesus advises us to watch. I can paraphrase: *"Keep an eye out for God working in your life. Do you see God? Follow His lead in everything and you will then be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man."*