

4 / Supplementing The Knowledge of the Lord

Adding the Knowledge to Your Desire for Excellence

Let knowledge be applied to a kind of scaffolding, making it possible for the edifice of charity to rise, to endure for ever, even when knowledge is done away with.

Augustine of Hippo

The Connection between Virtue and Knowledge

We have discussed adding virtue to faith; now, we must turn our attention to adding knowledge to virtue.

Where virtue is seen as desiring excellence and growth, knowledge is the means of providing truth to our dreams. I don't think "virtue" is without knowledge in the sense that it is given, but it does have limited knowledge; perhaps the missing piece is the **how-to** and the **why** of it all. Perhaps the power that makes our pursuit of being excellent, resting in Christ and in his ministry, that knowledge needs to be understood.

We probably have already heard that zeal without knowledge is not good. Below, we see Paul reprimanding some who depend upon legalism to bring them to faith or in the day-to-day living of the Christian faith.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. **Romans 10:1–4 (ESV)**

Why Is Knowledge, True Knowledge, So Important?

Ignorance of God and his workings is seen as a disastrous reality in the lives of people. It stands parallel to the idea of direct disobedience — both have similar effects. If a child falls down a tall cliff; whether by ignorance of the danger or defiance of parental oversight, there is very little difference in the outcome.

Ignorance of God and his plan is seen as willful suppression of truth in favor of freedom of behavior. For Christians, this tendency must be recognized, and we need to fight back against the fleshly part of our souls in favor of truth and revelation.

Ignorance of God has disastrous effects; let's examine Ephesians 4:17-19 and see what is there. These effects are not just for the non-Christian but for the Christian who doesn't put off the old self and put on the new.

- **The futility of mind** / *worthless, futile, purposelessness. Pointless thinking, empty thinking.*
- **Darkened in understanding** / *blinded understanding. Unable to see the truth and accept or act upon it.*
- **Alienated from the life of God** / *estranged from God, become foreign, separated.*
- **Ignorant** / *lack of knowledge, education, especially a lack of knowledge that leads to reprehensible behavior.*
- **Hardness of the heart** / *devoid of feeling and mental awareness, dullness, stubbornness, insensitivity.*
- **Callous** / *loss of feeling, dead to feeling, unfeeling, and without shame.*
- **Given up to sensuality** / *vice, lack of self-constraint, which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable.*
- **Greedy to practice every kind of impurity** / *desirous of more and more moral vileness, a deep push for deeper and worse behavior.*
- **Deceitful desires** / *self-indulgent behaviors lead a person to be deceived into thinking they are for our benefit.*

Paul's instruction in Ephesians 4:17 is that we should no longer walk in these ways, as the Gentiles do. His fixes include the following...

- **Know Christ** / *know about him, learn about him / Ephesians 4:20-21*
- **Put off your old self** / *do the work of shedding the mortal, fleshly self and its way of life / the old man / the sin nature*
- **Be renewed in the spirit of your minds** / *drink in the truths of scripture and the Holy Spirit's work in your life*
- **Put on the new self** / *put effort into putting into practice the renewed self*

As we can see, knowledge—particularly the knowledge of Christ—plays a large role in this process.

From Knowledge—to Truth—to Love

Repentance leads to truth and knowledge, and that knowledge of the truth brings true freedom(2 Tim 2:25, John 8:32). This influx of truth in our lives, received and applied, leads to spiritual growth in him. Consider the following.

Colossians 1:9–10 (ESV) / And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Notice here that God himself fills us with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. The goal of this seems to be at least threefold. (1) so that we lead lives “fully pleasing to him,” (2) so that we bear fruit in good works, and (3) increase in the knowledge of God.

In other words, we grow, and that growth is not necessarily for our own improvement; it is for God’s glory and for the benefit of those around us.

The list we are working through right now in 2 Peter 1 has as its ultimate end a deep understanding and practice of love. Love that outstrips simply “brotherly affection,” and is selfless and sacrificing in nature, like Christ.

This is the ultimate goal of knowledge, becoming people of love.

Some Potential Dangers in Knowledge

There are a few dangers to beware of, so let’s look at them briefly.

First, not all knowledge and wisdom is Godly knowledge or wisdom. There remains “wisdom” that is only such in name. Paul states in 1 Cor 2:6-7 that “among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.” Rather, Paul states that they “impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.”

The knowledge and the wisdom of the Greeks was not wise by the standards of men, and had their origins in the will of men, but was not God’s wisdom.

Second, like the Greeks, the fleshly-minded legalists of Paul’s day are also so condemned. As an example, consider Paul’s words from Galatians 6:12; “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”

To simply put this, some were pushing for gentiles in the day of Paul to be circumcised in order to save their own skins, so they could boast in them, and look good. These ideas were dangerous to the gospel and confused people at the time; salvation is not about circumcision and uncircumcision, but rather about faith and God changing the inner man of both Jew and Gentile alike.

There is danger in knowledge that is twisted by people who are only thinking in the flesh.

Third, we are all familiar with the Pharisees at the time of Christ. They are examples of people who had “knowledge,” but not “knowledge” combined with faith but rather with pride. These were men who knew the Old Testament inside and out.

Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 23 is epic. Yet, hopefully, it strikes us at the heart of our legalism and fleshly living, too, and brings us closer to repentance and further from pride ourselves.

Matthew 23:3–7 (ESV)

...For they preach, but do not practice. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, 6 and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues 7 and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

If we ever get to the point where our spiritual duties and actions before others are (1) hypocritical, (2) for show, and (3) for the praise of man, we know that our knowledge of God has been turned into a mockery of Jesus himself.

Fourth, there is danger in Knowledge if it doesn’t lead to self-application. This point is similar to the others. James puts it this way;

James 1:23–25 (ESV) / For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Scripture is not meant to make us look good, but to change us from the inside out. The law of Christ, the law of liberty, is meant to change us.

Note, that this law first changes us. Our task is to apply scripture to ourselves. It is “easier” for us to intend to apply it to others, for it puffs us up, but God is intending our humiliation not our exaltation. For our freedom. For our good.

An Example for You...

Add virtue to your faith, and knowledge to your virtue...

At the end of the last chapter I suggested that you go about thinking of an area in your life where you need to grow. Perhaps you did that.

I did, I chose for myself the following idea, as an area of growth in my life...

I struggle with forgiving people who have sinned against me

To this desire of virtue (desire for excellence) I want to add knowledge. So I will search the scriptures for the relevant passages and ideas and push into my heart and mind the truths of God's word on this subject.

What does scripture say about forgiveness? Take time to find the major passages on this idea in scripture.

Matthew 6:12-15 (ESV) / 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (See also, Luke 6:37ff)

Matthew 18:21-22 (ESV) / 21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Parable / Matthew 18:23-34

Matthew 18:35 / Conclusion of Parable / So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Luke 6:37-38 (ESV) / 37 "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

Luke 17:3-4 (ESV) / 3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

Ephesians 4:32 (ESV) / 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:12-15 (ESV) / 12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

After finding the major passages / take some time to synthesize what you learned from these major passages / make a list of the things you are learning. Here are some of mine.

Our forgiveness of others is somehow tied to God's forgiveness of us.

What we reap is what we sow. If it is condemnation, we will be condemned. If it is forgiveness, we will be forgiven. This is almost like the law of gravity, we will receive back what we dish out.

We need to forgive others, because Christ forgave us, and if we don't do so we do not understand what God has done for us. People who have been shown grace need to show grace in return.

Our forgiveness should be boundless / 70 times 7

Forgiveness is not simply tied to "forgive and forget," there is the process of confronting others in sin, and receiving their forgiveness. This is not simply a "sweeping under the rug" affair.

Our forgiveness of others in Christ is tied to the example of Jesus and his profound forgiveness of the sinner.

There are characteristics that we should lean on in forgiving others; they are listed in Colossians 3:12-15;

- **Compassionate Hearts** / *splanchnon* / affection in the inner parts/pity, mercy, compassion, sympathy.
- **Kindness** / *chrestoteta* / being helpful or beneficial to others / being warm-hearted, good, kind, generous
- **Humility** / *tapeinophrosynen* / modesty / the disposition of valuing or assessing oneself appropriately, especially in light of one's sinfulness and creatureliness.
- **Meekness** / *prauteta* / "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" / gentleness, consideration, meekness, even-tempered.
- **Patience** / *makrothymia* / "bearing up under provocation" / long-suffering with others / endurance.

- **Love** / agape / high esteem, affection, regard, concern, a desire to see others succeed / “consider others before self”

In considering all of these aspects, as if scripture is begging me to forgive, and also with that urging giving me resource after resource, reason after reason, I find that my spirit desires this forgiveness — to give it, perhaps to receive it myself. My self made arguments against it, in my flesh, melt away.

- **It was wrong** / yes, it was, and so were you, yet God forgave you
- **I didn't do anything** / um, sure you did. You were probably partially to blame for some of this too.
- **I shouldn't be treated this way** / yes, of course, but you are not special, everyone goes through things like this in their lives. You are not that important.
- **What if I am betrayed again?** / So, how much is 70 x 7? I thought that was a lot. What does it mean to be long-suffering?
- **Do I care for these people?** / Yes, in my gut they are my family, but if I cast aside my family I will find myself alone.
- **Must I humble myself, when they think they are so lofty?** / Since when has humbling yourself been a bad thing? Didn't Jesus do that? Didn't he humble himself to the greatest extent possible?
- **Do I love others?** Is it love of myself that I am after, or do I give of myself for the benefit of others? What is more Christlike?
- **What's going to happen to my spirit if I cannot forgive?** God will remind me of it, I will reap what I sow, and I am acting in opposition to the gospel.

After bathing in the truths of scripture, I would encourage you to soak in it for a few days and make some plans of action based upon what you have learned. In this instance, it needs to start in the heart — a broken and contrite heart.

It will do no good to tell yourself to shake hands without first shaking your very soul. Shake off of yourself whatever is of the flesh, put on that which is like Christ.

An Activity for You...

(1) Take the goal you arrived at in chapter 3 and write again below...

(2) From there, find all the relevant scripture on this topic. There are many ways of going about this. Do a scripture search of key words and find the relevant verses. After finding one relevant verse, look up cross-references. Collect them, read them, read them in context.

(3) Meditate on them

(4) From there, take some time to synthesize what is taught into bullet points of truths, so you can see what is there. Find out who, why, where, when, what, to what extent. This will help you think through the truths that are there. Consider my example a few pages above.

(5) Meditate on them a few days...

(6) Do what Scripture tells you to do, which will have two possible problems...

Self Control / are you able to tell yourself to do this thing?

Steadfastness / are you able to do this thing for an extended period of time?

These are the next two chapters...