

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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There's More: An "Epignōsis" of Jesus

by Dan Trygg

"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you... ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of Him." Ephesians 1:15-17

"For this reason also..., we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of God." Colossians 1:9-10

"...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:13

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ('good-devoted-ness'), through ('by means of') the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of Him who called us to his own glory and excellence..." 2 Peter 1:3

If you wanted a vocabulary to precisely describe the characteristics of different kinds of snow, you would probably want to talk to an Eskimo. They have 21 different terms for snow, each describing a unique aspect or characteristic of what kind of snow is to be found outside. There is powdery snow, ...crumbly, icy snow, ...snow that is soft and easily blown about, ...and snow that is not safe to walk on, because there may be open water underneath. There is snow that is good for sledding, ...and there is snow that is ideal for making igloos. Those of us who live in Minnesota, or who have had experience with snow, have an immediate awareness of some of these differences. In English, we have to use an entire phrase to differentiate one kind from another. The Eskimos have a vocabulary word for each kind, ...one word that is sufficient to communicate accurately the kind of snow condition that is to be found outside. **Why? Because snow is very important to the Eskimos. It is a matter of survival.**

The ancient Greeks had a fascination with abstract thoughts and ideas. They loved to talk about ideas and discuss philosophy. As a result, they developed a sophisticated vocabulary that described different nuances for thoughts, emotions, abstract ideas and experiences. For example, we have one word for "love", while they have four distinct words that identify different kinds of love. **We have one word for "knowledge", while they have three main words, with derivative forms that describe even more precise nuances.** There is the word, *epistamai*, which refers to informational knowledge or understanding. Sometimes it is about **knowledge gained by setting your mind upon something**, or giving attention to it (Acts 18:25; 19:15; 24:10; 1 Tim. 6:4; Heb. 11:8). Another word, *oida*, occurs 318 times in the NT. It refers to **knowledge by observation**. Again, this is more head knowledge or simple information by having seen something (e.g., Matt. 9:6). A third word, *ginōskō*, refers to **knowledge by experience**. This is personal, more relational knowledge, since it is an awareness or understanding that comes by virtue of experimentation or experience. This word occurs some 222 times in the NT (e.g., Rom. 1:21; 6:6; 1 Cor. 8:3). This word can be describing a knowledge as intimate as sexual intercourse (Matt. 1:25), or descriptive of the relational knowledge of a friendship (Matt. 7:23). The point is that it is experiential, personal, subjective, immediate, ...not distant, analytical or just objective information. So, we have knowledge by attention or cogitation, or knowledge by observation, and knowledge by experimentation or experience. **The first two kinds of knowledge are primarily just the awareness of facts and understanding of how things work in the world around us.** These ways of learning are more factual or information-based, but don't necessarily have an internal impact. **The third kind of knowledge is very immediate and personal. It implies involvement with what is being known, not just as a distant observer or perceiver. The knowledge of God described in the NT is based upon a *ginōskō*, experiential relationship knowledge. Knowing about God is not the same as knowing God, ...any more than someone knowing about you could be said to "know you", if they had never talked to you or interacted with you.**

But, as the title above suggests, **there's more to knowing God that He invites us to seek. There is more than simply factual knowledge, or even a relationship acquaintance with Him. There is an "epignōsis" experience and recognition of God that is to be a growing part of our relationship with Him** (Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Col. 1:10; 2 Pet.1:2,3). The word, "*epignōsis*" is an intensified form of *ginōskō* knowledge. It is a more intense, vivid and experiential knowledge that is a more thorough, immediate and complete than simply the experiential knowledge of God. **It seems to imply a flash of insight, or an "Aha!" kind of revelation that goes deeper, and brings about a sudden recognition or perception that did not come through mere information, observation or even experience.** It can refer to something as inane as "recognizing" the false prophets by their fruit (Matt. 7:16), or it can be as deep as being conscious of God at work in the world around you (Rom. 1:28), or having an immediate awareness of His will in a given circumstance (Col. 1:9).

Interestingly, in Romans 1, Paul said that **people experientially-know God** (*ginōskō* -- Rom. 1:19,21), **but they do not want to have or hold Him in recognition** (*epignōsis* -- Rom. 1:28). We all experience God in some way, but we do not all want to acknowledge Him, or even accept the revelation of His presence. **Other people may have a zeal for God, but they have no real clear perception of Him** (Rom. 10:2 – *epignōsis*). Romans 3:20 indicates that **a key function of the law is to bring us to a true recognition** (*epignōsis*) **of our sin**. Again, this is not just a theological concept, this is a personal revelation of our spiritual condition, ...a flash of insight, an eye-opening realization that we are sinners accountable to a holy God! **Five times, this word refers to a “recognition of the truth”** (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Tit. 1:1; Heb. 10:26 – *epignōsis*) **that was necessary to come to repentance**, or to have a breakthrough in understanding. This is more than just information. This is describing a deep, personal, flash-of-insight revelation of truth, an “Aha! I get it!” kind of experience. (Interestingly, the Greek word for truth literally means, “the unnoticed”. This seems to indicate that “reality is out there to be discovered”.)

Even after we come to faith, the scriptures teach that we are in need of ongoing insights or revelations such as this. Paul prayed for new believers that God would grant them a spirit of skill and revelation in recognition or true-knowledge of Him (*epignōsis* – Eph. 1:17). This focus in prayer is repeated in Colossians, **that we might obtain a “true knowledge” or “recognition” His will, and an ongoing increasing or growth in the “vivid awareness or perception” of God Himself** (*epignōsis* – Col. 1:9,10). **This is a goal or objective for our maturity, a “true-knowledge” of Jesus** (*epignōsis* – Eph. 4:13). Again, this is not theology, this is about vivid, personal, experiential glimpses of Jesus that will impact our lives. **Paul prayed for Philemon that the communion or partnership of his faith might become effective in the “recognition”** (*epignōsis* – 1:6) **of every good thing among them (as a group) for Christ**. This seems to be referring to insights or revelations about one another’s spiritual gifts, or the leading of the Spirit among them.

In Colossians 1, Paul spoke of his calling to be a servant of a stewardship from God, to fully-explain the mystery which had been hidden for generations, but now has come to manifestation, which is “Christ in you, the hope of the glory.” He saw it as his duty to proclaim and make known the riches contained in that reality. **Proclaiming the indwelling Christ became the thrust of his ministry**, admonishing and teaching everyone about this reality, so that he might move people on to maturity. **He longed to move people along to where they could come to a “recognition”** (*epignōsis* – 2:2) **of the mystery of God, Christ**. This is because our new selves are being renewed, or growing up, **toward a “true knowledge”** (*epignōsis* – 3:10) **according to the likeness of the One creating us**.

This seems to be where Peter is going in his description of our process of maturity in 2 Peter 1:2-8. The word, *epignōsis*, occurs three times in these few verses! Clearly, there is something very significant about this term. In verse 2, **Peter desires that “grace and peace be multiplied to you in the ‘recognition’ or ‘immediate, personal revelation’** (*epignōsis*) **of God and of Jesus”**. This is deeper than the language may appear to be on the surface in our English translations. Grace and peace don’t necessarily come through *knowing about Jesus*, or even *experiencing Jesus* in the past. Grace and peace will be multiplied to those who continue to “recognize” Him at work in their lives. **He goes on to say that “everything of His divine power that pertain to life and healthy-devotion have been given to us...”** How do we obtain this power? **“...by means of the “true-knowledge’** (*epignōsis*) **of the One calling us to His own glory and excellence.”** The power of God is already available to us! It has been set aside, at the ready, for us to discover and utilize! **But it comes to us through these vivid insights, these immediate, personal revelatory glimpses that come to those who seek to know Him and do His will.** Notice that in the *next* verse Peter says that **the things of God’s power have been given to enable us to become sharers, participants, partners in His divine nature or character**, having escaped the corruption of the world. **We are to become like Him, by sharing in His life!** Peter says that **this comes as we glimpse new revelatory insights** (*epignōsis*), **and apply them by faith**. In the next several verses, he talks about how *we have to do some work*. **We must apply ourselves to grow and mature by investing in learning, and implementing what we discover in practical ways.** In verse 8, he says, “If these qualities are yours, and are increasing, you will not be idle or fruitless in this ‘true knowledge’ (*epignōsis*) of Jesus Christ.” As we act on these insights from God, He will keep us engaged, productive and fruitful for the kingdom of God.

If God has given us all the power to do His will, and He has specific directions for us to pursue, or specific co-workers He desires for us to partner with to do His will, **these provisions, plans and partners may be designated for us already, but we do not perceive them**. Or there are aspects of God Himself, or our relationship in and with Him that we are unaware of. **Both Paul and Peter direct our attention to this phenomenon of asking for, waiting on, and expecting these intense, vivid, revelatory insights that God can give to us**. One of the reasons to teach on this, is so that we are anticipating these experiences, so that we respond to them when they come. This is not objective, external, verifiable knowledge. It is unapologetically subjective, personal, and immediate. **We are to test these insights by scripture and common sense**. They should be insights that enlarge our faith, and enable us to trust more, with greater clarity and definition. These insights will not draw us into esoteric or strange beliefs, but will help us to perceive with more crisp definition what God has for us. **We are to respond with faith and obedience to what God has revealed.**