

Knowledge is Power to Please

Colossians 1:9-12

You may have heard or used the saying “What you don't know can't hurt you”. That might be true in some contexts, but when it comes to the Christian life as a whole, what you don't know is precisely what hurts you. God said of Israel – “*my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*”. (Hos. 4:6). In fact, the only way you avoid getting hurt and living a Christian life that displays the sufficiency of Christ, is when you know certain things – when you have knowledge. In the Christian life – knowledge is power – power to please God. We want to see in this study, from the Word of God, the what, why and how of knowledge in the Christian life.

Paul, after telling the church that the news of their faith and love led him to pray ceaselessly, now goes on to tell them the content of his prayers. That is encouraging. It is great to hear someone say, “I'm praying for you.” It is even better when they tell you specifically what they have prayed for you.

Whenever the inspired apostle writes down his prayers, you should sit up and take notice, because usually, he is about to give a mini-description of the Christian life. The things Paul prays for, under inspiration of the Spirit are spiritual priorities. Take Paul's prayers in Ephesians, in Philippians, in Thessalonians – and you have the Christian life in capsule form. So when we examine the prayer, we are in fact examining the basics of the Christian life – Christianity 101, the ABCs of Christianity. That is a marvelous opportunity – to take it apart and see what comes first and what follows.

In brief, Paul prays that the Colossians **be filled** with something, as a result of which they will walk a particular way. All the other words in verses 9 to 12 are descriptive of these two actions – being filled and walking. If they are filled with this one thing, then the purpose of walking a God-pleasing Christian life will flow out of that.

The word for *filled* is a word which means to fill up; to make full; to satisfy. In fact, it is the same root word as the word in Colossians 2:9 – *you are complete in Him – you are filled up in Him*.

What is it that Christians are to be filled with?

Knowledge of the will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

What Paul asks for is a liberal, pouring, gushing supply of this knowledge, wisdom and understanding. He wants them to be vessels that the hose of knowledge has poured knowledge into until they are brimming and overflowing and ready to walk. He wants them to be continually getting filled with this knowledge.

Filled, in the New Testament, most often means 'controlled'. Be filled with the Spirit. Let the Spirit, and, in this case, the knowledge, be the dominant force in your life. Let it fill up every nook and cranny of your life, until the will of God is the lens which colours everything you look at.

Put simply – you need to know some things. When you know certain things, and that knowledge is dominant in your life, the Christian life is going to click into place. I want to focus on the knowledge aspect in this message.

If you are desirous to live a fruitful Christian life, and it hinges on knowledge, you should be asking a few questions: What is this knowledge? Why does it cause us to walk that way? Where and how do I get this knowledge?

Now, perhaps you are saying quietly within your heart, “No, that's not the answer. I don't need more knowledge. I have been getting knowledge about God all my life, and I am not that much further ahead for God. My head is sometimes bursting with knowledge from books, Bible studies, sermons – it feels like overload. Knowledge isn't the answer.”

And the Bible's reply is – that depends on what kind of knowledge you are talking about. There is a kind of knowledge which becomes like mental junk mail, and there is a kind of knowledge which transforms us and causes this kind of walk.

1. The Kind of Knowledge - Spiritual Wisdom and Understanding

Paul tells us what kind of knowledge it is. It is knowledge of the will of God – what God wants. The kind of knowledge you need to have and to pursue is not knowledge generally, about the things of God, or unrelated facts that have to do with Christianity – but specifically, the will of God. What God requires. What God desires. What He demands. What He is doing. What His purposes are. What His motives are.

Unfortunately, many think of the will of God as this hidden, mysterious thing, like a treasure map, which God sometimes gives you a peek at. But the Bible tells us the will of God is knowable.

Eph 5:17 *Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

God wants us to know it.

John 15:14-15 ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.* ¹⁵ *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

The will of God is found in the Word of God. The entire Bible is the revealed will of God. His Gospel is His will. His commands are His will. His promises are His will. His warnings are His will. His records of people's lives are His will. He wrote a rather long book to reveal His will. The only way the will of God could be doable was if the will of God was knowable.

Again, maybe you are thinking, I know a lot about the will of God, but it isn't changing me. But this Scripture here in Colossians tells us the knowledge of the will of God, to be effective, does not come by itself.

By itself, that knowledge will not do much. The devil knows the will of God. Demons know the will of God. They have a lot more raw information about what God wants than you do. But the text here tells us it is to come in a particular way.

Paul prays that you, his reader, will be filled with this knowledge **in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.**

That is no accident in choice of words. The Gnostics loved to talk about knowledge and wisdom and understanding. They said, ‘Christ is a good place to start. But then you need more, higher, special knowledge.’ Paul takes them head on, uses the words *knowledge*, *wisdom* and *understanding* and applies them to the truth. Wiersbe said the devil uses the Christian vocabulary, but not the Christian dictionary.

What does the Bible mean by knowledge, wisdom and understanding? The Bible, more than once, uses these three words together – knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

Proverbs 2:6 *For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;*

Proverbs 3:19-20 *The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens; ²⁰ By His knowledge the depths were broken up, And clouds drop down the dew.*

Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Proverbs 24:3-4 *Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; ⁴ By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches.*

Almost like a trinity. You cannot still have God if you try to remove one of the three Persons of the Godhead, so you cannot have true knowledge, or true wisdom or true understanding apart from the other two.

What is meant by these words in the Bible? You could think of **knowledge** as the raw truths, the facts about the will of God, plain for all to see and read in Scripture. The word for knowledge here is a slightly different word from the one the Gnostics used – it means ‘full knowledge, deep knowledge, penetrating knowledge.’

Wisdom is the ability, given by God, to correlate the knowledge, to sort through the facts, to be able to compare fact with fact, truth with truth. It is the skill that can weigh up the facts, and differentiate the most important from the less important. It can recognise priorities and distractions and hindrances. It is able to see ends and means. As you can tell, wisdom does more than casually gather facts, wisdom is meditating on the facts, considering, thinking, seeking to understand.

Wisdom is like the processor which takes all the inputs and adds them, mixes them, sorts through them.

Understanding, in the original, is a word which literally means 'to bring together'. Understanding is the result of wisdom – it is a bringing together of the various bits of knowledge and uniting them into a sensible, comprehensible, Godly decision. Perhaps you could say – knowledge is the input, wisdom is the processor, and understanding is the output.

But notice the word '*spiritual*'. That word ‘spiritual’ tells you the source of this wisdom and understanding. Knowledge of the will of God does not transform anyone. But when a believer is seeking to know the will of God and is spending time processing that knowledge, weighing it up, wanting to know how to use it skillfully, the Spirit of God comes and enlightens. The Spirit comes and connects the circuit. He comes and suddenly the lights are on, and those raw facts have become glorious, beautiful, compelling truths which motivate, challenge, convict and change. There is a difference as wide as the sea between simple knowledge and spiritual understanding.

Isn't it interesting that in that verse we quoted from Ephesians 5:17, Paul does **not** say ‘do not be *ignorant*, but *know* the will of the Lord.’ What he **does** say is ‘do not be *unwise*, but *understand* what the will of the Lord is.’

Now many Christians are disillusioned with knowledge, feeling like it seems to be water off a duck's back to them. But the problem is not with getting more knowledge, it is that it hasn't been through the processor, meditated on until God granted wisdom, and understanding resulted. They have considered some pieces of information – Christ is sufficient, Christ is supreme, Christ should be the satisfaction of my life – and they have those bits of knowledge. But it is like something raw, so it is not having any impact. You don't stick a big section of a sugar cane stem in your coffee and hope it will sweeten up. That cane must be processed into sugar. You don't put crude oil into your car's petrol tank and expect it to go – it must be processed into petrol. And knowledge which is not processed by the Spirit of God and your meditation, will simply remain raw knowledge and will not become spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is that end product of spiritual wisdom and understanding that turns the knowledge of the will of God into something life transforming.

At the end of his ordeal, Job said something very significant. He said:

Job 42:5-6 *"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. ⁶ Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes."*

As if to say – ‘I had simple raw knowledge previously, but now I have spiritual understanding.’

I Corinthians 2:14 says *"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."*

That is why an unbeliever can have all the same facts as you have, and it will make no difference to them. Or a fellow believer may have the same or more facts than you and it can make no difference to them. It is when knowledge of the will of God, in spiritual wisdom and understanding, fills you that a change will happen. That leads us to our second point -

2. The Purpose of Knowledge (Col 1:10a) - To Walk Worthy of the Lord

This filling with knowledge in spiritual wisdom and understanding is done with a purpose. You can always spot a purpose clause when you see the word *'that'*. The filling has the purpose of producing whatever follows the *'that'*. What does it achieve?

The knowledge, wisdom and understanding are there for the purpose of producing a **walk worthy of the Lord**.

The word *walk* in Paul's epistles refers to lifestyle, behavior, conduct. In other words: first the knowledge, then the application; first the doctrine, then the duty; first the belief, then the behavior; first the hearing, then the doing.

This is the way you know that the knowledge has turned into wisdom and understanding – when it shows up in your life. The way I know that oil was processed into petrol is because what they put into my car makes it go. So when the knowledge is not turning into a *walk*, it is still raw facts.

We should point out some dangers associated with that. The Bible warns you and I about knowledge that just sits there and isn't used. It's like milk. You either use milk in something, or turn it into something. But if it just sits there – it goes bad.

What does the Bible tell us happens to knowledge which isn't turned into action? What does it become instead?

Pride (I Cor. 8:1). It just inflates us, with a sense of *'knowing'* – being in the know, being knowledgeable, knowing more than others, being able to teach others, argue with others, disprove others – being an expert.

There is a kind of knowledge that some Christians love, because it is intriguing or deep or mysterious, but the reason they love it so much is that it seems to them it will require no action from them. They will not have to respond, they can just make a hobby out of satisfying curiosity. I have called it *'tabloid Christianity'* in the past, because it is like the same impulse that drives people to want to read tabloid magazines, the drive that leads them to seek knowledge with no application. Gossip is getting information about others that has almost nothing to do with you, and requires nothing of you.

Some Christians love to find a doctrinal hobby-horse which they ride – getting books, watching DVDs, reading websites, arguing with others, teaching others – but it is not changing them. They

are still cantankerous. They are still irritable. They are still given to unkind words. They still have some dishonest dealing with the tax man. They still watch sensual TV programmes. They still lust after money or popularity. They still pray very little. They still treat their spouse or children or parents or colleagues the same as they always did.

But Paul said of people like this:

2 Timothy 3:7 *always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

Knowledge is not there to make you a Bible Trivial Pursuit champion. It is not there so you can cross swords with others on doctrinal points and feel very good about yourself. It is there to produce a walk worthy of the Lord.

The reason this understanding produces a walk is simple. The more God grants you spiritual wisdom and understanding, the more you love Him. The more you love Him, the more you obey.

Let us allow James to give us the best illustration of this. **James 1:19-25**

James says the Word is like a mirror. A mirror reveals things you can't see by yourself. You can't see smudged eyeliner by yourself. You can't see cheese still in your moustache by yourself. You can't see food between your teeth by yourself. You can't see those wild hairs doing their own thing by yourself. So, a mirror shows you yourself in a way that you can't see by yourself.

But the reason you look into the mirror is so that you can change, adjust, fix. A man who looks into a mirror and does no adjustments, James says, is deceiving himself. How so? He thinks he is helping himself by appearing before a mirror, but because he does nothing about it, and forgets what he saw – the whole action was a waste of time.

So, the Bible, when illuminated by the Spirit of God, shows you yourself, shows you God's glory, so that you can adjust. To acquire knowledge and do nothing to apply it, means you are deceiving yourself about the whole process. It is like reading cookery books when you are hungry, or listening to a CD of a river noise when you are thirsty. It is like looking at a picture of your doctor when you are sick or spending time in a bank when you need money. All of those acts are acts of self-deception.

The purpose of the Word is to conform you to the image of Christ. It is to show you His will so that you may do it.

The words of Paul at his conversion should sum up the heart of a Christian. He asked two things: *“Who are you Lord?”* And then, *“What do you want me to do?”*

To walk worthy of the Lord, we seek to know the will of God. What does He want? What must I do? What must I not do? What must I put off? What must I put on? That's the purpose of knowledge.

That takes us to the third point in this passage.

3. The Path to Knowledge - Seeking to Please God.

How do we get this knowledge in spiritual wisdom and understanding that leads to a worthy walk?

Remember that this is something Paul was praying. Who was he then asking? God.

For Paul to ask that the Colossians “be filled” (passive) suggests this was not something the

Colossians could do for themselves. It had to be done by God. The Colossians were the vessels; God is the one holding this knowledge, wisdom and understanding. To attain spiritual understanding which leads to a worthy walk, God must do it.

Does that mean we have no responsibility when it comes to knowledge of His will, wisdom and understanding?

No, the Bible tells us in no uncertain terms that God gives this understanding, but He gives it to people who meet two conditions:

i. God gives understanding to submissive hearts.

One phrase here helps to understand much of the key to seeking God's will. It says “**fully pleasing Him**”. That's one word in the original. It explains what this walk is, and it shows you how to seek it.

Make up your mind that you want to please the Lord, and you will seek His will and find it.

The reason the will of God seems mysterious to people is because they do not think of it in these Biblical terms – the will of God is seeking to please God. Ask yourself - what will be pleasing to the Lord? What will be worthy of His character?

You can always answer that question, because it is revealed throughout Scripture. When you think of God's will in terms of what pleases Him, you know where to look and what to think.

Many Christians think of God's will when they come to big decisions, big turning points in their lives; big crisis points. However, they often are not thinking about God's will in the everyday details.

When you try to think of it in terms of the hidden plans of God, you cannot know it (**Deut 29:29**). It is pointless searching for what God has not chosen to reveal. There is a lifetime's amount of material regarding the will of God which He has revealed.

Jesus said something very significant in John 7.

John 7:17 *If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or **whether I speak on My own authority***

If you want to **do** His will, then you will know. God grants spiritual understanding to those who have decided they want to do it.

God isn't mocked. God doesn't give free samples of spiritual understanding. He doesn't give you a sample and then say – ‘so, do you want to buy in and actually do My will.’ He gives understanding when you come in submission and say – ‘whatever it is, I will do it.’

Paul's two questions when he was converted on the road to Damascus sum up this attitude “Who are you Lord?” and “What do you want me to do?”

ii. God gives understanding to seeking hearts.

Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *Therefore* get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. (**Pro. 4:5-7**)

(**Pro 2:1-7**) *My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, So that you incline your ear to wisdom, **And** apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, **And** lift up your voice for*

*understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth **come** knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; **He** is a shield to those who walk uprightly;*

It is said that a young man came to Socrates, the Greek philosopher and asked him, ‘How can I get knowledge.’ Socrates took him down to the river. Suddenly, he took the young man by the neck and pushed his head underwater. The man struggled to get free and come up but couldn't. Finally he broke free and came up gasping for air. Socrates said to him, “When you thought you were about to drown, what was it you wanted the most?” The young men, still gasping, said, “Air”. Socrates said, “When you want knowledge, the way you wanted air, you will find it.” You will discover nothing more than you know now, if you casually observe. Discovery is never casual.

This passage in Proverbs 2 repeats – it is the Lord who gives knowledge, wisdom and understanding. But He gives it to seeking hearts. When the will of God for your life – that is from the most mundane decisions to the most important ones, becomes a pursuit – you will find it. God does not hide His will. He wants you to do it. But it will only become wisdom and understanding that results in action when you go hard after it.

So it comes back to the processor. It is when you desire to do the will of God that you will seek it out. And when that knowledge comes, you will spend however much time and effort it takes to meditate on it, asking God for wisdom and illumination until the Lord grants understanding.

2Ti. 2:7 Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

You do the searching and thinking and praying – and God will give you the understanding.

The tension - you must pursue it, while asking for it, and God will grant it to you. If you say – ‘I want to please God, so I want to know His will for me in every area of my life’ – then God will grant you illuminated knowledge which naturally produces a worthy walk.

The parable of the sower proves that the problem of a lack of response to the Word is found in the heart of the one hearing; not in the seed or the sower. There were not four sowers, nor four seeds. There was one sower – one preacher of the Word, one seed – one inspired Word of God – and four soils; four responses. The point seems to be – when the pure Word of God comes to you, and it doesn't bear fruit – don't blame the sower, and don't blame the seed. Don't blame knowledge and don't blame reading or preaching. There must be the right environment for the seed to take root and bring forth fruit. The environment is very simple – seek to know the will of God – how to please Him. As you seek the will of God humbly, from that perspective, asking God to enlighten you, He will grant you spiritual understanding; and the fruit of a worthy walk will come.

Completed (Jackie)