

Knowing and Understanding God's Word

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Coming back once more to our theme verse for this weekend, let's read it again in order to go on to the next of its elements. Colossians 2:2 still says:

Colossians 2:2:

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

It speaks of coming to all riches of “the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement” of that marvelous things God has done for us in the Mystery. We'll talk tomorrow about the Mystery, the riches of the wisdom therein, but tonight we're going to focus on the importance of knowing and understanding the Word of God. And these two things – knowing and understanding – are not the same.

It doesn't do much good to have knowledge without understanding. We have that example in Acts Chapter 8, where the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Bible as he traveled. He owned a copy of the Scriptures and, apparently, had some interest in knowing them. But when Philip asking him, “Understandest thou what thou readest?”, the man very honestly responded: “How can I, unless some man should guide me?” This is the case with many Christians today. They own a Bible and they try to read it, but since they don't understand it, they get frustrated and bored and stop trying to read it. Nobody much likes things they don't understand. How many of you tried to read the Bible before starting to come to these fellowships, but didn't understand it? We end up looking for answers from other sources or we accept just believing in a God we don't really know. In fact, many times He's a God whose image we've invented in our minds because we don't have enough biblical information to be able to form a correct understanding of what He's really like.

The word translated “understanding” here is one that, in Greek, brought to mind a very beautiful mental image. It refers to where one river flows down from a mountain range onto a plain, while at the same time another river descends from another range, ending up joining together, flowing together. That's what happens when we get to that moment of understanding – our different thoughts flow together to the point that they click, there's the aha! moment. “I understand! I see!” When that happens with regard to our understanding God, understanding something in His Word, it's very exciting. That's why we say that learning God's Word is an exciting adventure.

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But, before we can come to have understanding, we first must have knowledge, and that's this other word "acknowledgement" here. Of the various words in the Bible related to knowledge, this one is the strongest one, the most emphatic one. It's to know deeply. A complete knowledge based on our direct participation, on our having personal experience from having interacted with the thing or person that we want to know and understand. And we all know that there's a difference between knowing something intellectually, mentally, just having read about it and having experienced it for yourself in your life.

This happens in many workplaces. Let's say that there's a new piece of equipment, a new procedure, or a new software program that we need to learn. Someone comes and says, "I'm here to train you in this. I'll teach it to you. Look, you do like this and then like this and then like this. Easy, right?" And then they leave. They may even give you a certificate that says you've graduated from the training course and that now others can come to you as a resource to find out about it. Well, you may have some mental knowledge of it, you may have read the manual, but can we really say that you "understand" it? Not even close! We can't say that we really know or understand it until we do what? Until we've practiced doing it ourselves. Until we've applied what we were taught and done it a few times successfully ourselves.

When I think of this, I think about speaking in tongues. When I first started coming to these fellowships, I hadn't even heard of speaking in tongues. I didn't have any knowledge, let alone any understanding. After having come a few times, I knew something – I'd seen and heard it done by others, I'd read some verses in the Bible that speak about it – and so, in one sense, you could say that I "knew" speaking in tongues. But once I spoke in tongues myself for the first time and then had done it enough that I was fully persuaded that it was God giving me the words by way of the spirit, that now I knew it on a completely different level. Those are these two words here in Colossians 2:2 – first to know something, starting by having studied it and been taught it, yes; but later having taken it to the point that I experienced it in my own life by acting on that knowledge. That way, what I 1) read in the Word, 2) what I was taught about it by others, and 3) what I learned by doing it myself, all flowed together, resulting in understanding. Now I can say that I not only know, not only know profoundly, but understand what speaking in tongues is.

If we trace this word for "knowledge" or "acknowledgment" in other places in the Church Epistles, we can learn more about it. In Romanos 10:1-2, Paul, speaking by revelation from God, said:

Romans 10:1–2:

¹ Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

² For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

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The word “knowledge” here is the same one we saw in Colossians 2:2. It’s talking about Israel here, but it could just as easily be applied to the majority of Christians today. They have a zeal of God. They’re very devoted, very fervent about their faith. They go to their church more than once a week. They listen to Christian radio stations. They have religious bumper stickers on their car bumpers. They’re very sincere in their love for God, but they don’t have the necessary knowledge of the Scriptures to be able to really know God nor understand His will, since the Word of God is the will of God and they know very little of it. Zeal for God can be lovely, but if it’s not accompanied by knowledge, a knowledge beyond just having read or heard someone teach about it, it will produce no fruit, as we’ll see a little later.

As sons and daughters of God, we are to have both. In the first half-hour of the Foundational Class we were told: *“No only do we need to have a knowledge of the integrity and accuracy of God’s Word, but we must also get the zeal, the enthusiastic believing, the concern that other men and women might know that the Word of God is the will of God.”* That’s to be the goal.

So, zeal for God, in and of itself, is not enough. Nor is it enough to be religious or even to have a religious position. Jesus Christ, when confronting the religious leaders of his time – those that had been through the rabbinical schools, that were the supposed scholars of the law of God, those that taught the Word to the rest – said to them in Matthew 22:29 that they were erring, they were mistaken in their understanding, “...not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” They also were zealous and had certain knowledge, but it was incorrect knowledge, different from the true knowledge and understanding that God wants us to have of the Scriptures and the power of God.

Remember that this correct understanding of the truth implies and requires that not only have we learned it but that we also have put it into practice. In the Book of James, it speaks about being doers of the Word and not only hearers. Otherwise, we’re deceiving ourselves. We think we know, but we don’t really understand. We err, and I don’t think anybody likes to be wrong.

God also talks about this knowledge in Ephesians Chapter 1, starting in verse 16.

Ephesians 1:16–19:

¹⁶ Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

¹⁷ That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

That’s our same word – a true and full knowledge by way of the Word and having put it into practice.

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¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened [**eyes representing our spiritual understanding**]; that ye may know [**three tremendous things**] what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

God wants His sons to know these marvelous things that He's given us. They're part of the riches of the Mystery that Colossians 2:2 talked about. He wants us to be fully persuaded of them; that we walk with our spiritual eyes open, seeing things as they really are, as God sees them.

Another place where it talks about this knowledge is in Chapter 1 of Philippians. We'll begin in verse 8.

Philippians 1:8–11:

⁸ For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;

Paul prayed that the love of God of these sons of God would abound more and more, resulting in two things: knowledge (our same word for a true, deep, and personal knowledge) and judgment, something different in this context. This is the ability to perceive or distinguish between different spiritual matters, as verse 10 says:

¹⁰ That ye may approve things that are excellent;...

Without, not only a knowledge of God's Word but a detailed knowledge of it, an understanding of it based on having learned and lived it, we can't distinguish properly between the spiritual things that are good and those that aren't, those that are rightly divided and those that are spiritually rotten

And this is a problem among believers at times. I see too many believers who, when they have a question about the Bible, go to Google and do a search. Seriously? Much of what you find is spiritual garbage. And, even if it were good, how are we going to know if we don't master a knowledge of the truth? Or they send things to their coordinators, saying, "I found this. Can you tell me if it's okay or not?" It's better to ask than to assume that everything's okay and correct. But instead of doing that, why not invest that time and effort in making yourself more of an expert in the basics of the rightly-divided Word – the material from the Foundational and Intermediate Classes and the collateral studies. We don't need anything new. We need to become experts in the genuine in order to be able to detect the counterfeit. It's interesting to note that, in any field of activity, those that really distinguish themselves and are the big winners aren't those

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who do anything different from the rest, but those who perform the basics with sharpness and faithfulness time after time after time.

It's the same in the spiritual field. A great goal for every believer is to get to the point of mastering the basic truths of the Word in order to be able to separate truth from error.

And what are some of the benefits of doing so? Verse 10 continues on to say...

...that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

Christ is going to return. (That will be the Day of Christ.) And we want him to find us, not only doing the best, doing the will of God, but also not causing others to err also. That's what the words "sincere and without offence" refer to. "Sincere" is that we ourselves are as free as possible of faults, of spiritual errors. "Without offense" is that we haven't made others stumble by giving them wrong information. It says here that these two things will require walking in an abundance of the love of God AND getting to the point of having enough knowledge and understanding of God's Word to be able to distinguish between spiritual things that present themselves – which are true, which are the ones that have the profit of God.

According to verse 11, the result of our learning to walk this way is that we will be able to be...

¹¹ ...filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Certainly we want these things – to be able to be filled with much spiritual fruit in our lives, and thereby God will be glorified and praised. Well, we're seeing exactly how to accomplish that!

There are two more uses of our word for true, complete knowledge based on personal experience in the first chapter of Colossians. Like what we just saw in Philippians, this is a prayer for the believers, what God wants to see in our lives.

Colossians 1:9–11:

⁹ For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding [**that's to be filled to capacity, not in dribs and drabs**];

¹⁰ That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

¹¹ Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

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It speaks of being “filled with the knowledge” of the will of God and “increasing in the knowledge of God,” both using the same word we began with in Colossians 2 – this knowledge that is true, complete, and personal from having studied and practiced the truth of God.

This doesn't happen automatically from just having a Bible or attending fellowships during the week or an Advance such as this one. It requires putting on the Word of God in our minds and lives by personal study and repetition. It starts with simply reading the Bible a lot. The problem is that very few people spend time reading these days. The majority of people don't read for pleasure or entertainment, let alone for learning. The Adversary has manipulated our cultures such that our attention span is increasingly shorter and shorter. We consume everything in small bites – reels in Instagram, TikTok, shorts in YouTube, etc. And we reduce the incomparable Word of God to cute little pictures of kittens with fragments of a vers and pass those around on social media. My God! Let's get serious.

Jesus Christ lived the most powerful and successful life of any human being that has ever lived. How did he do it? By loving God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, by his study and application of the Word of God in every situation, together with his operation of the power of God. Certainly he was an example of these words “knowledge” and “understanding” that we're seeing here. According to what's recorded in the Gospels, he quoted something from God's Word more than 150 times, including 70 different sections of 24 different books of the Old Testament. And all of that without a Bible in his hands. From memory. And, not only did he know the Word, but he knew what part of that Word to apply to what situation. He had spiritual eyes that were enlightened, wisdom, discernment. Where did he get them from? From the time he spent in his personal study of the Bible.

We know that Jesus Christ said that, after he would go to his Father, we would be able to do the works that he did and greater works. I think we forget that one of his works was his working and knowing the Word of God. Of course we want to see more of his works in terms of miracles and healings and things like that. But all that was based on the Word that he knew and practiced. His attitude was that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God.” He said, “sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth.” To get to the point that Colossians talks about here, it's going to take the same kind of attitude and the kind of hunger to always do the will of God that he had.

In 2 Peter Chapter 1 we find the next uses by God of our word for knowledge. In fact, it appears several times in this section. Verse 2 says:

2 Peter 1:2–3:

² Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

Not only that the grace and peace of God are added to us but multiplied. And what will produce those? This knowledge (once again the true, full, profound, and lived knowledge) of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge that can only be found in the Word of God. It appears again in verse 3, where it says:

³ According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, [**Great! Where! How!**] through the knowledge [**a full knowledge acquired by study and the experience of practicing it**] of him [**God**] that hath called us to glory and virtue:

The son or daughter of God has access to all things that pertain to living a life more abundant and having a real and intimate relationship with God, through the knowledge and understanding of His Word, His will.

So, doesn't it seem to you that it's worth it to invest in having more of this knowledge? In the world, everyone recognizes that if you're going to dedicate yourself to pursuing a career – as a doctor, lawyer, engineer, athlete, businessman, soldier, or whatever – and to distinguish yourself, stand out, requires years of study and learning, training, and practice. They organize their lives in order to pursue whatever would help them with that. They make their decisions based on how they will affect the development of that career:

- They decide what university they will attend in order to receive the best preparation possible.
- They decide where they're going to live in order to better their career opportunities.
- They decide how they will dress in order to advance their career.
- They decide what organizations they will belong to in light of trying to make connections or network in ways that will optimize their career.
- In their free time, they seek to read or study things that will better their understanding of subjects related to their jobs.

Karen and I have a niece who wants to be a vascular surgeon. She's already been through four years of college, getting her first degree. Then four years in medical school. Now she's in her 2nd of 5 more years of residency, which will be followed by 3 more years of specialization in surgery. It's after all that, that she can begin to go into practice as a surgeon. And everyone says, "Commendable! Fantastic! Look at how committed she is! How great."

And all that is fine. There's nothing wrong with seeking to pursue a career, to be good at something. But which career comes first? The career of being a believer is the highest one to which anyone can aspire. If her friends come and say, "Hey. We're going out to eat and maybe go dancing afterwards," and she responds, "You know, I have an exam on Monday and I have to

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study for it”, or “I’m in the middle of a project for work” or “I have a presentation I have to get ready; I’d love to go but can’t this time,” they’d say “Sure, we understand. You’re very committed. That’s great.” But what if those same friends came to you and said, “Hey, we’re going out Saturday night” and you responded, “Sorry, that’s the night my Bible fellowship meets” or “You know, I think what I need to do that night is just stay home, read the Bible and spend some time praying.” Their response is likely to be, “What!?! What’s that about. What a waste of time. We feel sorry for you. You’ve become a religious nut.” Clearly there’s something wrong with our scale of values.

The highest, most important career that exists is that of being a son or daughter of God.

- A vocation and career of loving obedience to God and His Word.
- A vocation and career of learning to know the will of God and put it into practice.
- A vocation and career of training ourselves to develop our ability to study and understand the Scriptures and operate the manifestations of the spirit with precision, with boldness, with believing to bring deliverance to us and to others.

It’s the only career that guarantees your success. It’s the only career whose benefits last beyond this lifetime. Don’t you think we should be investing at least the same effort in developing that career as we would in developing a career in the world? I would say yes, but that’s between each person and God. In Ephesians 4:1, God beseeches us to “walk worthy of the vocation to which we’re called” by Him: He exhorts us to rise to that standard.

Do we decide where we’re going to live, how we pass our time, with whom we hang out, who we marry, and everything else in order to maximize our getting ahead in our career as believers? Or is it just a minor consideration, something we take into account after all the other factors, something that’s second, third, fourteenth in our priorities.

Let’s look at verse 8 of this first chapter of 2 Peter. Our word for “knowledge” appears here again.

If we’re going to be and do everything God has called us to, it’s going to require investing in this career of being a true believer. In order to be the best son or daughter of God I can be requires the same level of education, preparation, and dedication as any other career. More, I would say.

2 Peter 1:8:

⁸ For if these things be in you, and abound,...

Not just have a minimum of knowledge, a basic knowledge, and be satisfied with that. If you abound...

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... they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge [**a true, complete, and profound knowledge**] of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has called us to produce much spiritual fruit in our lives in our walk with Him. But we don't have the luxury of being lazy in seeking to know and understand His Word.

Just think of the benefits that we've seen that a son or daughter of God who actively seeks to know and understand God more fully by studying and applying His Word enjoys:

- Our understanding of the things of God will flow together, allowing us to reach the full assurance of understanding, to the point that we're fully persuaded, we believe His Word.
- We develop a zeal, a concern for God according to His will and not our own.
- We can discern between spiritual things that are the best and those that aren't, so that when Christ returns, he can find us as much as possible without faults and without having made others to err regarding the truth.
- We come to have an enlightened understanding of the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding power of His might toward us who believe.
- We will be filled with the fruits of righteousness of God by Jesus Christ to the end that God is glorified and praised.
- We'll have wisdom and spiritual understanding.
- We'll walk worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in all things, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.
- We'll be strengthened with might according to His mighty power.
- We'll enjoy access to all things that pertain to life and a personal relationship with God.
- And our walk will be worthy of our calling by God to the vocation of being sons of the Highest, saints, members of the Body of Christ.

In 2 Timothy 2, verses 3 and 4, we see once again this word for a full, true, and personal understanding by active participation in the truth.

1 Timothy 2:3-4:

³ For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

⁴ Who will [**it's His fervent and intense desire, it's His will to**] have all men to be saved [**that yes, but not only that but also**], and to come unto the knowledge [**a true, full and personal knowledge**] of the truth.

God is not satisfied with less than that, and nor should we be. Look at how much more there is to learn and to enjoy! Look at all the benefits that this brings to this life and the eternal rewards we will receive in the future for living this way now! Let's have that passion, not only for knowing the truth, understanding, and practicing it, but also for making it known to others.