

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Levels of Knowledge and Perceptivity

by Dan Trygg

“For the king *knows about* (*epistamai*) these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things *escape his notice* (*lanthanō*); for this has not been done in a corner.” Acts 26:26

“Don't neglect (*epilanthanomai*) hospitality, for some have entertained angels *unawares* (*lanthanō*).” Hebrews 13:2

“Have You come to destroy us? *I know* (*oida*) who You are-- the Holy One of God!” Mark 1:24b

“And now, brethren, *I know* (*oida*) that you acted in *ignorance* (*agnoia*), just as your rulers did also.” Act 3:17

“They are darkened in their understanding (*dianoia*), excluded from the life of God, because of the *ignorance* (*agnoia*) that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.” Ephesians 4:18

“Someone did touch Me,” said Jesus. “*I know* (*ginōskō*) that power has gone out from Me.” Luke 8:46

“You will *know* (*ginōskō*) the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

“...to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord into every pleasing thing, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the *true-knowledge/recognition* (*epignōsis*) of God...” Colossians 1:10

One of the limitations we have to deal with in understanding the Bible, or in learning to recognize God's activity in our lives, is that our language is not as descriptive as the original languages. We do not get the full impact or implications of some of the words used by the Biblical authors, because the terms used in translation do not adequately convey these same subtleties of flavor. It has been helpful to me to do a little more research into these terms, and then reexamine the text armed with my new understanding. As I do so, I am amazed at how this broadens my grasp of not only how things are, but also what God is saying I can expect from my relationship with Him. This also leads to a better understanding concerning how to approach growth in my life and in my walk with God.

There are fundamental differences between our Western orientation toward “knowledge” and the Eastern mind. Our Western culture has been deeply affected by Greek culture and philosophy. In our culture, knowledge revolves mostly around ideas and propositions. We focus on what we can understand with our minds, and put into words. We minimize emotional or intuitive experiences, and tend to say we don't “know” something until we have reached a conclusion that can be put into words. This is not absolute, but it is a *tendency* of our culture. Then, what we conclude may be just an idea in our minds, a “fact” that may have little or no affect on how we live. This disassociation of truth from living would be curiously odd to most Eastern peoples. There, the entire pursuit of new insight is for the purpose of incorporating it into one's life, not simply to satisfy one's curiosity or to store in one's mind. The Eastern mind would look at the entire process of discovery as “knowing”, including the sensory experience, the emotional feeling, or the intuitive hunch. Even if I can't put it into words, it is moving me from unawareness to greater awareness, so it is “knowledge”. In this process there is also a more holistic response to the experience, as well. Separation from the experience becomes less and less as you invest yourself more and more. In that culture, you really “know something” when it has become part of you.

Let's start our survey of NT words at the most basic level, ignorance and unawareness. The Greek for “not know” something is *agnōeō*. It occurs 22 times in the NT (e.g., Mk. 9:32; Acts 13:27; 17:23; Rom. 6:3; 7:1; 10:3; I Cor. 12:3; II Cor. 2:11; I Thess. 4:13; Heb. 5:2; II Pet. 2:12), and the related noun form occurs twice (I Cor. 15:34; I Pet. 2:15). It is the negated form for one of the more common words for knowledge. It simply means “to not know, to be unaware, to not understand, or to be ignorant” of something. The word “agnostic” is derived from this word. Lack of knowledge leaves us vulnerable to danger, and we miss out on God's provision for our lives, simply because we are not aware of what is available to us or how it works. The OT watchword of Hosea the prophet was, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” If “knowledge is power”, then ignorance is lack of power.

A second word is *lanthanō*. This word refers to what is “unnoticed, unobserved or unrecognized”. It occurs 6 times in the NT (Mk. 7:24; Lk. 8:47; Acts 26:26; Heb. 13:2; II Pet. 3:5,8). What is significant is that we could miss out on the activity of God simply by not being observant, or not tuning in to watch for what He is doing. The word can also suggest choosing to overlook, disregard or forget something that we may not *want* to see or acknowledge. The Greek word for truth is the negated form of this word. It means “unconcealed” or “recognized”. We miss out on so much, just because we are not paying attention, or are oblivious to what is happening around us. The Hebrews 13 passage is especially significant here. People have entertained angels without knowing it. How many other things are going on all around us that are prompted by the spirit world, or by God, but we do not recognize.

The next word is *epistamai*. It occurs 14 times in the NT (Mk. 14:68; Acts 10:28; 15:7; 18:25; 19:15,25; 20:18; 22:19; 24:10; 26:26; I Tim. 6:4; Heb. 11:8; Jas. 4:14; Jude 1:10). It indicates turning one's attention toward something. It

refers to intellectual knowledge about something, or understanding about something. There may not be any personal experience with what or who you are thinking about, just knowledge *about* them. For example the demon in Acts 19:15 said to the sons of Sceva, “Jesus I recognize (experientially-know), and I know-about (*epistamai*) Paul, but who are you?” The demon knew about Paul, though he had not any personal experience in dealing with him. There was no knowledge of these other people at all, so the demon challenged and attacked them, driving them out naked and wounded. **Most of what we learn in school is knowledge-about things.** We have little or no actual experience with them. **They are just facts or information we have tucked away in our heads.** They may become relevant, or they may remain as background trivia in our minds. The philosophical discipline of epistemology deals with the study of knowledge, how we learn, and how to evaluate what we learn.

The next word is *oida*. The word itself is a form from the word, *eidō*, which meant “I see”. The form, *oida*, refers to action that happened in the past with ongoing affect. In other words, “I have seen something, and I still remember it”. ***Oida* is knowledge by observation.** It is one layer deeper than *epistamai* because it is the conclusion of *my* experiences or observations. **This is the most common word for knowledge in the NT.** It occurs 318 times.

The next word is *ginōskō*. It occurs 222 times in the NT, and the related noun form occurs another 29 times. **It emphasizes knowledge by experience or personal acquaintance.** Because it is experiential, it tends to describe the learning *process*, more than the *conclusion*. **It is experiential, but not necessarily complete or full knowledge.** For example, this word is used for sexual intimacy. A person could “know” someone in this way, but not really know their inner thoughts and personality. In John 8:32, Jesus tells us that if we abide in His word, we will experientially-know the truth, and the truth will set us free. If we live out Christ’s teachings, we will experience reality, and that will liberate us. This happens in little bits or stages. We don’t have to know everything to experience glimpses of truth that will liberate us. Another passage is John 13:35, “in this all people will *experience* that you are My disciples, if you have *agapē*-love for one another.”

The final word for our consideration is *epiginōskō*. The verb occurs 44 times in the NT, and the noun form is found 20 times. **It refers to a deeper, personal, experiential recognition or flash of insight kind of knowing.** **The word often indicates a fuller, deeper understanding and participation with the insight received.** The experience of this truth is an “Aha!” kind of encounter that moves a person to a new level of awareness, understanding and experience. It is used of “recognizing” false prophets (Matt. 7:16,20). In Matthew 11:27, Jesus says, “No one *truly-knows* the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone *truly-know* the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son may determine to reveal Him.” In Mark 2:8, we see **Jesus had a flash-of-insight in His spirit** regarding what His enemies were reasoning in their hearts, and He addressed their unspoken thoughts. Mark’s report of the woman with the flow of blood indicates a revelatory-perception that power had gone out from Him. From Luke 8:46, we see that He experienced something when the power left Him to heal her, even though He was not conscious of her at all. Mark’s account adds to that feeling a recognition-insight of what it was that He felt, and what it meant. **It is possible to disregard this kind of insight.** Romans 1:32 refers to an innate recognition that God will judge what is evil. In this case, however, the insight is purposely disregarded, and these depraved people go on to not only practice such things, but to even encourage others to do the same! **According to Romans 3:20, a true-recognition of sin comes through the law, a necessary step in seeing our need for salvation.** It is possible to be a religious person, and even have a zeal for God, and yet not have a true-understanding, and therefore be missing the truth (Rom. 10:2). **We repeatedly find Paul praying for this kind of revelatory knowledge for the Christians he knew** (Eph. 1:17; Phil. 1:9; Col.1:9,10; Philem. 1:6). **This kind of “knowing” is most desirable, and Paul saw it as central to his mission,** and that of every servant of God (II Tim. 2:24,25; Tit. 1:1). The apostle Peter indicated that **everything we need to live the Christian life comes to us through this kind of flash-of-insight-recognition of God** (II Pet. 1:3).

In review, you can be *ignorant* of God, *overlooking* the signs of His presence in the world, or you can move past that to *know-about* God through things you read or what others might say. You may come to some conclusions *about* Him from insights or facts you may pick up along the way. You may even have some *experiences* of God in some fashion or another, and yet have no real flash-of-insight kind of experience of Him that leads to a real relationship with Him. For that to happen, Jesus must purpose to “uncover” or “reveal” God to the seeker in an *epiginōskō* kind of encounter. Thankfully, that *is* God’s heart. **God wants all people to be saved and come to a true-recognition of the truth** (I Tim. 2:4). It is important to see that all of these are legitimate ways of gaining insight and understanding. What I hope we learn from this study is the realization that **there is more to learn, more to pursue, and it is incredibly valuable.** I also hope we move past our culture’s expectation that “knowledge” is equivalent to knowing-facts-about-things. **I hope we are motivated to study, ponder, pray and press after those kinds of life-transforming insights that will change us forever.**