

St. Paul Shows the Certainty of Spiritual Knowledge.

by Daniel Steele

Daniel Steele's sermon emphasizes the certainty of spiritual knowledge through the Holy Spirit and the believer's relationship with God.

Scripture: Romans 1:28, Romans 3:20, Romans 10:2, Colossians 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2 Timothy 3:7, Titus 1:1, Hebrews 6:11, Hebrews 10:22, 2 Peter 1:1

Topics: "Spiritual Assurance", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the importance of having a full assurance and certainty of spiritual knowledge, emphasizing the impact of the outpouring of the Spirit in quickening spiritual perceptions. He delves into the compound words used by the apostles post-Pentecost to express the clarity and exactness of their spiritual understanding, highlighting the believer's access to God without hesitancy through the fullness of the Spirit. Steele discusses the significance of attaining a full assurance of hope and the highest degree of divine evidence of persevering grace, contrasting Calvinism and Arminianism views on assurance. He explores the concept of epignosis, a strengthened form of knowledge, stressing the Christian's privilege to know God without doubt and the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing spiritual truths.

Transcript

We close this extended series of readings by showing the effect of the outpouring of the Spirit in quickening the spiritual perceptions and giving a certitude of God and of spiritual realities. We will limit our reading to the study of only two compound words employed by the apostles after the day of Pentecost to express the fullness, clearness, exactness, and certainty of their spiritual knowledge.

Heb. 10:22. The first word is *placophoria*, "most certain confidence." "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." The key to the meaning of this noun is found in the use of its cognate verb in 2 Tim. 4:5. "Make full proof of thy ministry"; and in 2 Tim. 4:17. "That the preaching by me might be fully known." The verb here used was used by Justin, the martyr, when examined by the prefect Rusticus. Said the prefect, "Do you suppose that you will ascend up to heaven to receive some recompense there?" -- "I do not suppose," was the martyr's ready correction, "but I know and am perfectly assured." This means that the fullness of the Spirit enables us to come to God without any hesitancy, disbelief, or diffidence as to our right and fitness through the blood of Christ to draw nigh to the Holy of Holies, the place of God's presence. This right is far higher than that of the Israelite when sprinkled with the blood of the first

covenant at the base of Mt. Sinai. For the true believer in Christ has a superior qualification, being provided with holiness inwrought by the Holy Spirit, to enter into the sanctuary, or Holy place, where God dwells. For all believers are priests, and have the priestly prerogative of access to God, not granted to the Hebrew laity

Heb. 6: 11, "But we earnestly desire that every one of you do show the same diligence with regard to the full assurance of hope unto the end." This teaches us that converted Hebrews had a full conviction and a joyous assurance, which they are exhorted to keep unshaken to the end of their Christian course. On this text Wesley bases his doctrine that to some at least is granted the highest degree of divine evidence of persevering grace, and of eternal glory. See his notes. J. Fletcher concurs. See his, "Checks," vol. 2., p. 659, note.

This idea harmonizes more perfectly with Calvinism than with Arminianism. For this reason Methodists have generally abstained from preaching a state of grace not attainable by all, but bestowed on a few favored ones -- the assurance of eternal salvation.

Col. 2:2. That the gospel abundantly satisfies the demands of reason and the intellect is shown where "the full assurance of understanding" is spoken of, beautifully expressed by Meyer as "the lofty blessing of full certainty of Christian insight," the whole riches of which may be attained by all believers in Christ who claim their heritage by faith. The cumulative fullness of spiritual certitude described in this verse is surprising indeed, as we shall very soon see. This full assurance of the intellect is grounded on the testimony of the Spirit.

This word is found also in 1 Thess. 1:5. "Much assurance." This is interpreted as expressive of the assured persuasion on the part of the preachers who had proclaimed the gospel in power and in the Holy Ghost. They did not preach with an interrogation point at the end of every utterance, as if in doubt themselves.

Much is said in the New Testament, especially after the day of Pentecost, about knowing God, and our adoption into his family, and the indwelling of his Spirit, and the certainty of spiritual realities. The ordinary word for knowledge in classic Greek is *gnosis*. But Paul added an intensive prefix to it, changing it to *epignosis*, giving it a stronger meaning. Peter in three instances follows Paul's example. Hence this Bible reading is constructed upon the word *epignosis* found in the Greek Testament, inadequately translated in most of the versions, though I have a version by Dean Alford which has it accurately translated, which version will be used in a part of this Bible Reading. The subject is the Christian's privilege to know God without a peradventure or a doubt, to be certain of the forgiveness of sins, and of the indwelling of the divine Comforter and Sanctifier. The object of the lesson is to show that God has laid down no foundations for doubt, or for uncertainty, in this important matter. For it is a matter of transcendent interest to every human being. To know God is eternal life; and some are without the knowledge of God. I speak this, says the apostle to our shame.

I am to discuss the question of how far we may know God in this life. There is no dispute among Christians that we have a revealed knowledge of God in his word; but this does not satisfy, because it is indirect and roundabout. It is designed to be a steppingstone to a better kind of knowledge. It is a knowledge through testimony, the testimony of others coming down to us through the centuries that are past; the latest testimony given is eighteen hundred years old. We want a more certain knowledge than that. We want a direct knowledge. Men wish to have a knowledge of God at first hand if it is a possible thing. Hence the

philosophers have sought after this direct knowledge of God, and they have not succeeded very well. They are called theosophists. They have sought through physical operations, through magic, and some of them have thought they could find God at the bottom of their crucibles, in the laboratory of the chemist. We have even the German fire philosophers, who labored very hard to find God by chemical processes. A great many, especially in India, thought they found God by intense thought, going away by themselves and sitting down and thinking, and thinking, and thinking upon one subject. And some of them say they have had a mental illumination which has enabled them to grasp God as an object of direct knowledge. These are called the philosophical theosophists.

I sympathize with this desire to have a direct knowledge of God, clear and satisfactory, the knowledge of God in spiritual realities; but I abhor what is called theosophy, because it ignores the revealed knowledge of God, and does not seek God through his word. It seeks him through other agencies such as I have just described. The great difficulty with these people is that they apply the wrong organ to spiritual knowledge. They apply the intellect, the head instead of the heart. It is very much like applying the ear to the rainbow in order to perceive its beauties, and the eye to an oratorio in order to, delight in its music. We know God through love. St. John tells us that. He that loveth not knoweth not God. I may have the intellect of an archangel, but if I do not love I will not know God. That is the difficulty with theosophy.

Its second great difficulty is that it knows nothing of the Holy Spirit. God reveals himself to us through his Son Jesus Christ, but he communicates himself to us through the Holy Spirit. This is the beautiful relation of the three persons in the Trinity -- God the Father, revealing himself to the world, to our intelligence, to our faith, rather our intelligent and reasonable faith, in his Son Jesus Christ, but giving a direct and experimental knowledge of himself by communicating himself to our spiritual intuitions through the person of the Holy Ghost.

After the Holy Ghost was given a word comes into the Greek Testament which is not found in the four Gospels, a strengthened form of the word knowledge, *epignosis*, meaning exact, clear, full, perfect, satisfactory knowledge; of course not exhaustive knowledge of God and of spiritual things. All these adjectives are used by the various great scholars of the age now living, and some who have passed away -- by Meyer, Bishops Lightfoot, Ellicott, and Westcott, and Dean Alford, and many others.

Now let me read a few passages in which this word occurs, and you will see how much it adds to the strength of the New Testament. Perhaps the question may arise in your mind why the revisers did not translate this strengthened word for knowledge, by the use of the adjectives which I have given. The revisers of the New Testament were far more conservative than the revisers of the Old Testament in some particulars, and they hesitated to put in two words instead of one. They hesitated to put in the adjectives which I have indicated--full, clear, perfect, exact, certain; though some of those very men in their commentaries do thus translate it.

The first passage is Rom. 1:28, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge [full knowledge, clear knowledge, certain knowledge], God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" or becoming. If you will read that first chapter of Romans, you will be struck with the fact that in several places it is said God gave people over to certain things, and those things were the things which they liked, and God gave them over because they did not like a full and clear knowledge of him. He gave them over to some very unworthy and base things. So that they exchanged monotheism, or the knowledge of the one God, for images of four-footed beasts, and birds, and creeping things, and began to worship them.

In Rom. 3:20 the word occurs again. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the FULL knowledge of sin."

Men may have a knowledge of sin without the written law. The pagans all over the world have a knowledge of sin, a somewhat indefinite knowledge; but when God's law is preached to them, they begin to have a knowledge of sin that puts them under condemnation, weighty condemnation, and they begin to cry out after the mercy of God. So the adjective "full" brings out that fact -- that the law or revelation is requisite to the full knowledge of sin, as well as the full knowledge of God. Bishop Taylor in his preaching says that first he broadswords his congregation with the law -- cuts them down, cuts their hearts through and through with the law. In his great tour through Southern Africa, made in 1867, among the Kaffirs, he generally preached two days in each place; and the first day he preached on the Ten Commandments, and the second day he preached on the day of Pentecost, and the outpouring of the Spirit. The Kaffirs were converted a hundred in a day, seven thousand in all.

Rom. 10:2, "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to exact and certain knowledge."

The Jews had some knowledge of God; but they did not have a full knowledge of him, because they did not recognize his Son through whom he reveals himself to men. Hence he says, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to definite knowledge." A zeal to know God, and to serve him, very imperfectly and very fanatically, because they rejected the grand organ of divine revelation, which is the divine Logos, the eternal Son.

Now turn to Col. 1:9, 10, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the PERFECT knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

Mark the strength of the expression. Filled with knowledge, filled with a thorough knowledge of God's will. That shows us the path of duty pretty clearly. It pours the light upon us. A thorough knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; or spiritual sagacity, spiritual sharp-sightedness.

Phil. 1:9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge."

That is, in full knowledge. The strengthened word is used here. And in all judgment, all perceptivity.

Just mark the strength of these terms here for knowledge, both of them. Abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all perceptivity. It is a very strong expression. I call your attention to the fact that this 9th verse justifies me in saying that love is the organ of knowledge, the knowledge of God. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more." Love is the sphere in which knowledge, full, clear, satisfactory, experimental knowledge, dwells.

Heb. 10:26. This throws light upon a very perplexing question, "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."

A man wrote me the other day, an eminent preacher, wanting that passage explained to him. There is used here the strengthened form of the word knowledge. If we sin willfully after that we have received a clear, full, undoubted, thorough, satisfactory, and experimental knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. What does he mean? He is writing to the Hebrews. If a converted Hebrew backslid, where did he backslide to? He slipped back into Judaism. If a Jew had been converted and brought into

the full, experimental knowledge of the truth, and then had deliberately gone away from Christ and rested again in Judaism, of course he rejects not only Christ, but the whole system of truth of which he is the center. He can find no salvation now in Judaism. There is no salvation there for him. I do not say that every Jew is going to be lost. Many pious Jews may be saved on the same ground that the pious pagans may be saved, if they have the spirit of faith and the purpose of righteousness. They may never have seen a New Testament; they may have been brought up under such circumstances that the light of Christian truth has not had any chance to shine in their minds, and they can be saved on the same basis that the pious pagan or the pious Mohammedan may be. What do I mean by the spirit of faith? The disposition to grasp the object of faith were it presented. What do I mean by the purpose of righteousness? The disposition to walk by the rule of the divine requirements, the Ten Commandments, if that rule were made known.

Now we will read this passage again, calling attention to the fact that the word "sin" in the present tense denoting continuousness here signifies not a single act of sin, but a course of sin. If a Christian Jew enter upon a career of sin, a continuous course of sin, willfully, after he has received the full experimental knowledge of the truth of God's salvation, and then deliberately turn away from it, and go back to Judaism, he would find in Judaism no sacrifice adequate to meet his case. If he should repent and come back, there is still virtue in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ to save him. That is my understanding of this difficult passage.

2 Pet. 2:20. This is in the same line. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the FULL knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have fully known [here is the strengthened verb] the way of righteousness, than, after they have perfectly known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

2 Tim. 2:25, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the full or certain knowledge of the truth."

The word "acknowledging" in the King James Version is the word which I am speaking of, the word for full knowledge.

2 Pet. 1:1-3, "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us; through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the CERTAIN knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord; according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."

Huxley, the great scientist, in the year 1869 invented a new term, agnosticism, which was caught up by all the people that did not know God and his salvation, and were filled with doubt upon the subject, and were running into various forms of skepticism and materialism, and they all of them began to apply that word to themselves, and began to boast that they were agnostics. We can find many people here, in the Athens of America, who are saying, with manifest pride, "I am an agnostic, I am an agnostic." What does an agnostic mean? It means an ignomus. That is the exact meaning of the word. How do they use it? They use it to mean that they do not know whether God exists, and they do not know that he does not exist. They do not wish to be called atheists. So they take this position: Is there a God? I do not know. Is atheism true? I do not know. Is there a hereafter after death? I do not know; there is not sufficient proof. God is so great and

infinite, the human mind is so narrow and finite, that it cannot have a knowledge of God. Then they say that God is unknown, and therefore he is unknowable. We have no faculties by which we may know him, because the finite cannot grasp, cannot comprehend, infinite. That is the great trouble that intellectual men are in now. They cannot find out that there is a God and be certain about it. Let them come forward for prayers. Let them repent of their sins. Let them cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Let them keep that up a few hours, and they will begin to find out that there is a God. And if they keep it up a few hours more they will find out that he is a pardoning God. If they come in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, turning away from their sins, their pride, abandoning every other hope and every other plea, casting themselves upon the broad merit of the atoning death of Jesus Christ, they will find the pardon of their sins. And if they keep on and plead the promises made with respect to the day of Pentecost, they will find a personal pentecost, the fullness of the Holy Ghost, God imported by the Holy Ghost I into the very center of their beings.

That is the great trouble with the agnostics. They are applying the wrong organ to the question of spiritual knowledge. Let them come and seek God with the heart, believing in his Son, and they will soon find their feet standing upon the everlasting rock of certainty. Gladstone says, "Although I cannot embrace the mountain with my arms, I can touch it with my hand. Knowledge may be positive, though it is not exhaustive."

In Titus 1:1, the same word occurs. The strengthened Greek word occurs in all these passages. "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the CERTAIN knowledge of the truth which is after godliness." The short epistle of Philemon has the same word in it in the sixth verse. "That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the FULL knowledge of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."

You do not know what good things are in you until you receive this knowledge by the Holy Spirit, revealing himself, revealing God to you; translated in our version, by the word "acknowledging." We do not know ourselves, our real worth, till we know God by a heart experience.

I suggested that there was one writer that dared to translate these passages aright. Dean Alford, in his commentary, calls attention to the fact in all these cases. In his version he puts in the adjective in many of the passages, some of which I am now about to quote.

Eph. 1:17, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in FULL knowledge of him."

I call your attention to these because some of you might imagine that I am developing this Bible Reading out of my own imagination. Dean Alford was one of the most eminent men of England, a divine in the Church of England, who spent his life on the Greek Testament. In his notes he is very emphatic upon rendering this term by some such adjective as this.

God has laid down no foundations for doubt; he does not want people to walk in the mist, not knowing whither they go. If you will have faith in the Lord Jesus you will be brought out into a large sphere of knowledge. Dean Alford, I believe, enjoyed what he himself insisted upon in his commentary. I was touched the other day in reading in the Encyclopedia Britannica a little account of him, where it gives what is written upon his tombstone, "The lodge of a pilgrim on his way to the New Jerusalem." He knew God and he had a sense of the reality of spiritual things. He knew that there is a new Jerusalem to which he would come.

Eph. 4:13, "Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the PERFECT knowledge of the Son of God, unto the full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." --Alford.

This remarkable text was made for such a discussion as this. Christ has gone up on high. He has sent down or called into activity various orders of ministers, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come" -- this is the final and grand aim of the whole -- "till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the perfect knowledge of the Son of God." Not two unities, but one. Every version and every manuscript of the Greek, except the last critical ones issued from Cambridge, have a comma here in the wrong place, a comma after faith. What is the unity? It is faith becoming knowledge, faith merging into knowledge, faith ending in knowledge, the oneness of faith and knowledge. Till we all come in the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. All true faith ends in knowledge, and the knowledge is perfect knowledge, according to Dean Alford's translation. Not exhaustive knowledge, but experimental, and hence, perfect knowledge, in the sense that it excludes doubt. Agnostics say no man can know God because God is so large; no man can know him because the finite cannot fathom or grasp, or reach clear round the infinite. Bless your dear soul, must a knowledge be perfectly exhaustive in order to be positive? Do you know the Atlantic Ocean? You have seen a part of it, have you not? but you have not gone from bottom to top, from the North Pole to the South Pole; you have not been upon every single yard or square foot of it. But you are positive that you know it. A knowledge of a fact does not depend upon our having an exhaustive analysis of it. We may have a certain satisfactory and positive knowledge without having an exhaustive knowledge. Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the perfect knowledge of the Son of God. And that we cannot fathom. No man knoweth the Son but the Father. This is one of the grand proof-texts of his divinity. No man has a sounding-line long enough to fathom the Son of God but the Father. Nevertheless, we may have certain knowledge of him and be perfectly sure that we know him and are united with him. We may be positive and certain of it without a doubt, because the Son of God reveals the Father to us who believe.

Col.3: 10; "And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto PERFECT knowledge after the image of him that created him." '-Alford.

That shows a work of grace after the new birth. Have put on the new man, which is renewed, being renewed, in perfect knowledge, after the image of him that created him.

Col. 2:2, "That their hearts may be confirmed, they being knit together in love, and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the THOROUGH knowledge of the mystery of God. "-Alford.

Most of the manuscripts put in as an explanation of what the mystery of God is -- Christ even Christ. Thus is it in the revised New Testament. The King James version reads, "Of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." But I call your attention here to the cumulation of phrases, as if St. Paul had strained the Greek language so we could almost hear it snap, to pile up phrases strong enough to express his own conception of the clearness of the knowledge which we may have of Jesus Christ. "Unto all riches!" When anything is superlatively excellent, St. Paul always brings out this word "riches"; riches of grace, riches of assurance, riches of knowledge, and so on. Unto all riches! Not some riches. "All riches of the full assurance of understanding!" God provides for men's intellects as well as for their hearts. To the perfect or thorough knowledge of the mystery of God, which is Christ.

1 Tim. 2:4, "Who willeth all men to be saved, and to come unto the CERTAIN knowledge of the truth."-Alford.

Yes, that is God's wish, not his decree. He wishes all men to be saved, and to come to the certain knowledge of the truth. Hear this, ye who walk in darkness, you are not walking according to God's will. Mr. Spurgeon one day in his sermon spoke of having had a great conflict with doubts. The deacons took him aside and asked him why he did not confess that he had been stealing horses, or stealing sheep, or something of that kind. They said it was just as bad to doubt God as it was to violate his law. And Mr. Spurgeon said that he stood reprov'd. He never would again doubt God, or confess his doubts of God. The deacons were right. It is not God's will that we should walk in doubt, but in the certain knowledge of truth.

2 Tim. 3:7, "Ever learning and never able to come to the FULL knowledge of the truth."-Alford.

Did you ever see any such persons? Our churches are full of them. The purpose of this Bible Reading is, if there are any readers of this class, that they may be shamed out of their living in this wretched state. Take God at his word! Put his promises to the test, and see if you do not mount up above the mist to a place where the sun shines day and night all the year round!

2 Pet. 1:8, "For these things being in you, and multiplying, render you not idle nor yet unfruitful towards the PERFECT knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."-Alford.

The things spoken of here is the list of Christian virtues, beginning with faith. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue [or courage]; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance [or self-control]; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if these things be in you and abound, they will make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the perfect knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, do not say that all this perfect knowledge is going to be after you are dead! A great many people are putting every good thing beyond the river of death, and living on starvation rations here. Just take the promises of God, and enjoy them this side of the river. This is the divine purpose. There is a very great comfort and very great strength in it.

At the suggestion of Joseph Cook and Dr. McCosh the word merognostic, knowing in part (1 Cor. 13:12), has been invented and put into the so-called "Standard Dictionary. Whether this new word will become current in the English language we are not certain. It may be convenient to express our narrow view of God's providences and our limited intellectual conceptions of his nature and works. It is certain that Paul did not need it to express his experimental knowledge of God in Christ, his personal Savior and Lord. As regards the assurance of Christian truth, Paul was neither a gnostic, implying a conceit of spiritual knowledge; nor an agnostic, professing ignorance of revealed truth; nor a merognostic, having only doubtful glimpses of divine verities: but he was an epignostic, rejoicing in perfect assurance of spiritual realities. This last word, invented by the author of this book, has as yet no standing in reputable English, but it is easily derived from epignosis, and is quite intelligible to the Greek scholar, indicating one who knows God in Christ beyond a doubt. Although the term may not be in the dictionary, the reality is in the heart of every one who claims his full Christian heritage. Thus endeth this reading of the Scriptures. May it be to God's children, wandering in the dark forests of spiritual uncertainty, a blazed path out into the sunny clearing where they can see the open gates of the celestial city.

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