

The Practical Path to True Knowledge (Epignosis)

An Examination of Epignosis in Paul's post Acts letters

A practical ministry to my children

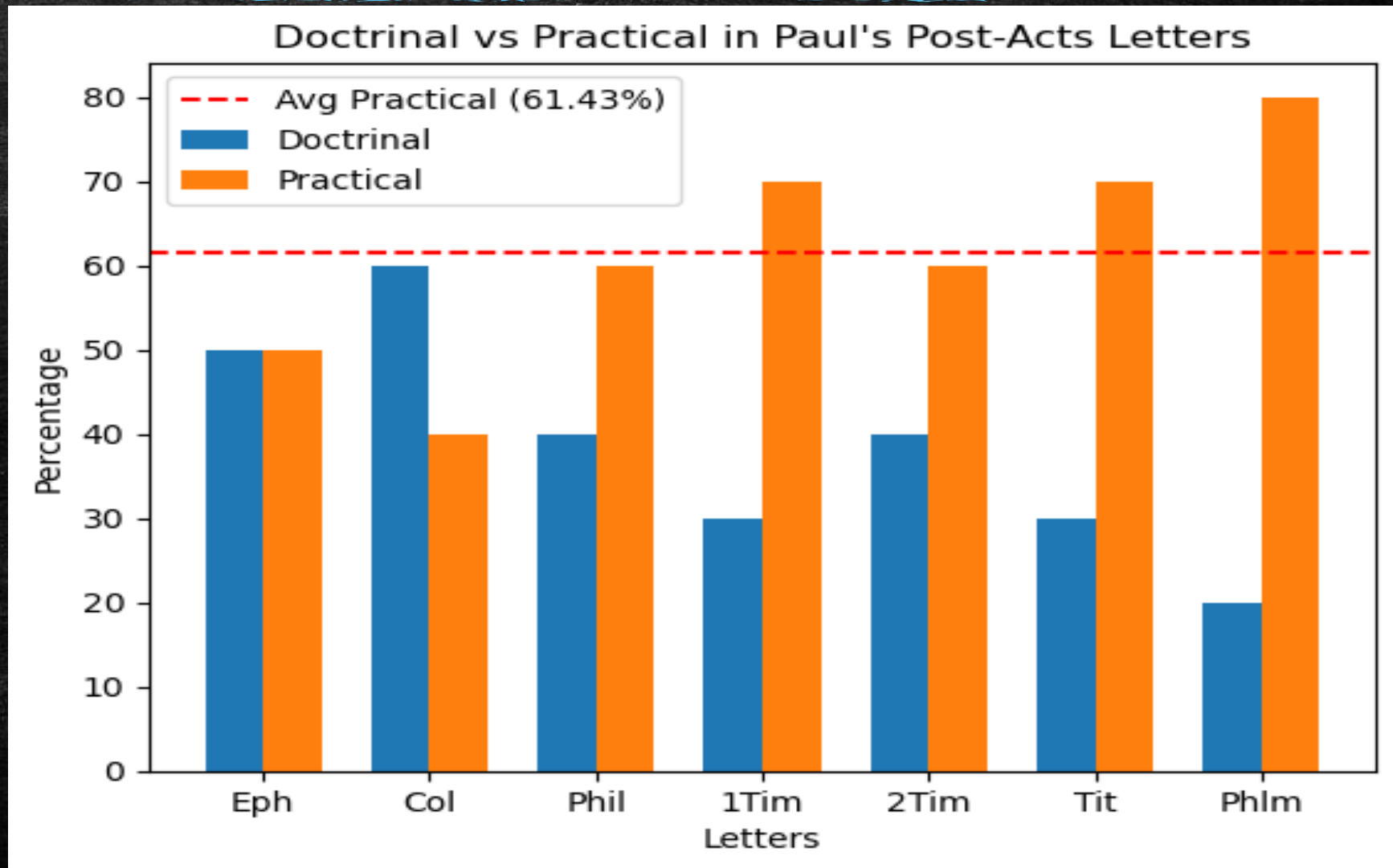
- My main ministry is to my children through Bible study. We need to be the best stewards of what the Lord gives us
- **Focus:** practical truth
- These studies deeply resonate with my own walk, as in 2018 I stumbled greatly and had to discover what was important in my life. It was through this process that I discovered the power of prayer and truly relying on Him for everything
- This experience on going, hopefully for life
- Through these studies to my children, the practical instructions in Paul's last 7 letters have become more evident and profoundly important
- Will attempt to explain why

Knowledge, Self Denial & Job

- I want to examine the Greek epignosis (knowledge) in the NT, particularly Paul's last 7 letters and how it is heavily focused on *how we live, our conduct, our walk* as believers, not just mere intellectual or conceptual knowledge. It has a much greater transformational power than gnosis
- Will show that epignosis closely related to the phrase "lose your life to find it" spoken by Christ in His earthly ministry as self denial is paramount to attaining 'this knowledge'
- Job a wonderful example of one who eventually humbled himself through self denial and experienced true knowledge

Groundwork: Practice vs doctrine in Paul's post Acts ministry

- Majority of content in Paul's last 7 letters emphasize practice over doctrine
- **Why?** That is the question. After all, Paul's post Acts letters minister to those who have been revealed the Mystery (Eph. 1:9)
- 3-fold



1st: The Lord knows we have struggles

- Ephesians 5:14-17 Wherefore he saith, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.* See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord [is].
- This letter written to those who have been enlightened to the truth of the Mystery

1st: The Lord knows we have struggles

- 2Tim. 2:24-26 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all [men], apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the **acknowledging (epignosis)** of the truth; And [that] **they may recover themselves** out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.
- “Returning” to soberness. All about falling into sin as a believer and “regaining” a sober mind.
- Context is practice

1st: The Lord knows we have struggles

Ephesians

Sexual immorality
(Ephesians 5:3)
All impurity (Ephesians 5:3)
Covetousness (Ephesians 5:3)
Filthiness (Ephesians 5:4)
Foolish talk (Ephesians 5:4)
Crude joking (Ephesians 5:4)
Deceitful schemes
(Ephesians 4:14)
Bitterness (Ephesians 4:31)
Wrath (Ephesians 4:31)
Anger (Ephesians 4:31)
Clamor (Ephesians 4:31)
Slander (Ephesians 4:31)
Malice (Ephesians 4:31)

Philippians

Selfish ambition
(Philippians 2:3)
Conceit (Philippians 2:3)
Grumbling (Philippians 2:14)
Disputing (Philippians 2:14)
Their god is their belly
(Philippians 3:19)
Glory in their shame
(Philippians 3:19)
Minds set on earthly
things (Philippians 3:19)

Colossians

Sexual immorality (Colossians 3:5)
Impurity (Colossians 3:5)
Passion (Colossians 3:5)
Evil desire (Colossians 3:5)
Covetousness (which is idolatry)
(Colossians 3:5)
Anger (Colossians 3:8)
Wrath (Colossians 3:8)
Malice (Colossians 3:8)
Slander (Colossians 3:8)
Obscene talk (Colossians 3:8)
Lying (Colossians 3:9)

1st: The Lord knows we have struggles

1 Timothy

Lawless and disobedient (1 Timothy 1:9)
Ungodly (1 Timothy 1:9)
Unholy and profane (1 Timothy 1:9)
Murderers (1 Timothy 1:9)
Sexually immoral (1 Timothy 1:10)
Men who practice homosexuality (1 Timothy 1:10)
Menstealers (1 Timothy 1:10)
Liars (1 Timothy 1:10)
Perjurers (1 Timothy 1:10)
Whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:10)

2 Timothy

Lovers of self (2 Timothy 3:2)
Lovers of money (2 Timothy 3:2)
Proud (2 Timothy 3:2)
Arrogant (2 Timothy 3:2)
Abusive (2 Timothy 3:2)
Disobedient to parents (2 Timothy 3:2)
Ungrateful (2 Timothy 3:2)
Unholy (2 Timothy 3:2)
Heartless (2 Timothy 3:3)
Unappeasable (2 Timothy 3:3)
Slandorous (2 Timothy 3:3)
Without self-control (2 Timothy 3:3)
Brutal (2 Timothy 3:3)

Not loving good (2 Timothy 3:3)
Treacherous (2 Timothy 3:4)
Reckless (2 Timothy 3:4)
Swollen with conceit (2 Timothy 3:4)
Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:4)
Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5)

1st: The Lord knows we have struggles

Titus

- Insubordinate (Titus 1:10)
- Empty talkers and deceivers (Titus 1:10)
- Liars (Titus 1:12)
- Evil beasts (Titus 1:12)
- Lazy gluttons (Titus 1:12)
- Defiled and unbelieving (Titus 1:15)
- Detestable (Titus 1:16)
- Disobedient (Titus 1:16)
- Unfit for any good work (Titus 1:16)

Philemon

- Unforgiveness (inferred from the context of Philemon)
- Lack of reconciliation (context)

2nd: The Peace of God is experiential

- Paul says “do” and the peace of God will be ours
- Since all of Paul’s post Acts letters written to those to whom the Mystery has been revealed, this peace of God has to do with our walk, our conduct
- Akin to “perfecting our faith”
- Phil. 4:7,9 & Col. 3:15 (peace of God mentioned)

2nd: The Peace of God is experiential

Colossians 3:14-17 - And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And **let the peace of God rule in your hearts**, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Philippians 4:7-9 - And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, **do: and the God of peace shall be with you.**

3rd: “The reward of the inheritance” – Col. 3:24

Col 3:24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

The inheritance

Eph 1:11, 14 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ... 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Col 1:12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

3rd: “The reward of the inheritance” Colossians 3 concerning our walk

Col 3:18-24 18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love [your] wives, and be not bitter against them. 20 Children, obey [your] parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. 21 Fathers, provoke not your children [to anger], lest they be discouraged. 22 Servants, obey in all things [your] masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: 23 And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Final thought re: the reward of the inheritance Follow the rules & unashamed of This Truth

- At the foundation of walking worthy of the Mystery, we need to be unashamed of this hope & calling. 2 Ti. 1:8,12
 - 2Ti 1:8,12 - 8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; ... 12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.
- Walking worthy of the Mystery need to be done by the rules (Paul's last 7), all according to this hope & calling 2Ti. 2:5
 - 2Ti 2:5 RSV An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Our ministry should reflect the practical character of Paul's last 7 letters

1. **Ephesians** – Calls us to grow in spiritual maturity and live a life worthy of our high calling.
2. **Philippians** – Inspires us to rejoice, remain humble, and persevere through trials.
3. **Colossians** – Urges us to center our life on Christ and walk in wisdom and godliness.
4. **1 Timothy** – Encourages us to pursue personal integrity, sound doctrine, and faithful living.
5. **2 Timothy** – Strengthens us to endure hardship and remain steadfast in our faith.
6. **Titus** – Challenges us to live a life of good works and reflect sound character in a broken world.
7. **Philemon** – Demonstrates how we can embody forgiveness, love, and reconciliation in relationships.

Knowledge, Self Denial & Job

Here we go...

- I want to examine the Greek epignosis (knowledge) in the NT, particularly Paul's last 7 letters and how it is heavily focused on *how we live, our conduct, our walk* as believers, not just mere intellectual or conceptual knowledge. It has a much greater transformational power than gnosis
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Epi-Gnosis: The prefix intensifies the meaning

- **Epi**: means *upon, over, or full* — it intensifies the meaning
- **Gnosis**: means *knowledge* — typically intellectual or conceptual but can also be experiential
- **Epi-gnosis**: combines both to mean **a fuller experiential knowledge**— something that transforms the knower
- Will focus on the noun form

Vine's Dictionary

- **GNOSIS** “a seeking to know, an enquiry, investigation”
- **EPIGNOSIS** denotes “exact or full knowledge, discernment, recognition,” and is a strengthened form of GNOSIS, expressing a fuller or a full “knowledge,” a greater participation by the “knower” in the object “known,” thus more powerfully influencing him. “In all the four Epistles of the first Roman captivity it is an element in the Apostle’s opening prayer for his correspondents’ well-being, Phil. 1:9; Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:9; Philem. 6”

Paul prays for epignosis in last 7 letters, never gnosis

Philippians 1:9

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

Ephesians 1:17

"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:"

Colossians 1:9

"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;"

Philemon 1:6

"That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."

Epignosis: A More intimate and relational knowledge

J.B. Lightfoot, a 19th-century theologian, notes

- Gnosis: "Knowledge that involves intelligent comprehension but is not necessarily personal or experiential."
- Epignosis: "...to the end that knowledge may manifest itself in practice, that your conduct in life may be worthy of your profession in the Lord"

Epignosis: A More intimate and relational knowledge

E.W. Bullinger, notes

Gnosis: “the knowledge or understanding of a thing”

Epignosis: “a more thorough participation on the part of the knower; a knowledge that has a powerful influence on the knower”

Epignosis: A More intimate and relational knowledge

Marvin Vincent, notes on Epignosis:

"...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge (epignosis) of sin." Noting that **"the knowledge of sin here (Ro 3:20) is not mere perception, but an acquaintance with sin which works toward repentance, faith, and holy character."** (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament. Vol. 3, Page 1-40)

- In other words, knowledge that is obtained through personal experience.

Epignosis: A More intimate and relational knowledge

“...**Epignosis**” refers to deep, rich, full, **experiential knowledge**. It is the knowledge that comes through **personal acquaintance** with the truth. Philemon could read of forgiveness, or hear a sermon about it. But until he forgave, he could have no **experiential knowledge** of it. By forgiving Onesimus, Philemon would experience that good thing in him known as forgiveness. By walking in obedience to God’s will, believers experience the good things God has placed within them. There is a vast difference between reading a book on skiing and actually skiing. There is a certain flat, one-dimensional knowledge to be gained from a book, but it cannot compare to experiencing the exhilaration of a downhill run. The same thing is true in the spiritual realm. It is thrilling to grasp a truth from Scripture intellectually. But it is far more exciting to live that truth out in **practice**. **Practicing** the truths of Scripture leads to the **epignosis** that brings spiritual maturity (Ep 4:12,13-see note Eph 4:12; 4:13). It is wonderful to understand what it means to trust God, but more wonderful to **experience** His power in the times when we trusted Him with no strength of our own.” (MacArthur, J. **Philemon** page 210. Chicago: Moody Press)

A look at where Epignosis is used in the New Testament

- Epignosis used 22 times in NT, Paul used it 15
- Our **walk** in view, in nearly all uses in Paul's last 7 letters
- **Ephesians 1:17** –praying for **epignosis**, their understanding had been enlightened, and they had already been revealed "the Mystery of His will" Eph. 1:9
- **Philippians 1:9** –praying that love abounds through **epignosis** & insight
- **Colossians 1:9** –prayer for **epignosis** of the Lord's will
- **Colossians 1:10** –prayer for increase in **epignosis** for a worthy walk and fruitful works
- **2 Timothy 3:7** –always learning, but never able to come to the **epignosis** of the truth (Eph. 4:20 "ye have not so learned Christ") – all concerning our walk, way of life, conduct
- **Titus 1:1** –**epignosis** is according to godliness

Ephesians 1:17 – What exactly is Paul praying for?

1:17 KJV - 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:

1:18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

may give = subjunctive mood; not a certainty

Ephesians 1:17 – Paul prays for knowledge for those who were already revealed the Mystery

1:17 KJV - 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:

Knowledge = epignosis / a super relational – knowledge

So, Paul is praying for epi-gnosis for these saints, who have already been revealed the Mystery 1:9 and whose understanding has already been enlightened 1:18

Eph 1:9 Having made known unto us the *mystery of his will*, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

Ephesians 1:18 – “may know” & “enlightened”

A done deal, with ongoing effects

“may know” & “enlightened”: Perfect Tense: The meaning of the word *perfect* is *complete*, therefore the perfect tense has to do with *completed action*. *It emphasizes the present, or ongoing result of a completed action*

1:18 The eyes of your understanding **being enlightened**; that ye **may know** what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

Being enlightened = Having been enlightened

May know = For your knowing or may know more fully

This prayer vs 17. in accordance with fully realizing vs. 18 & 19

1:18 The eyes of your understanding **having been enlightened; that ye may know more fully** what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his **inheritance in the holy places is**, 1:19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

These Ephesians knew their hope & calling (vs 9,18), but Paul wanted them to realize it to the point where their relationship with the Risen Christ granted them a "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the epi-gnosis of Him". A deeper and fuller understanding of their calling, which in turn would cause them to "walk worthy" of it

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges **that ye may know]** as the immediate effect of the illumination. Observe, they "knew" these things already. The experience in view is novel not in kind but in degree.

Lose Our Life (Self) to Find It

Matthew 10:39: "Lose your life for my sake to find it."

Matthew 16:25: "Lose your life for my sake to find it."

Mark 8:35: "Lose your life for me and the gospel to save it."

Luke 9:24: "Lose your life for my sake to save it."

Luke 17:33 "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

John 12:25: "Hate your life in this world to keep it for age abiding life."

- Life = psyche = soul = we are a living soul; therefore it carries the meaning of **SELF**

“Lose” & “Find”

- **Lose** = to forfeit, lose, waste, destroy.
- He who “forfeits his life, counts his life as waste, destroys his life in this world, loses his life” will find it more abundantly in the Lord.
- To deny the pleasures of “self”
- **Find / Preserve** = to discover through practice and experience; “to bring forth alive” E.W.B.
 - “Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead...” Eph. 5:14

Epignosis & Self Denial (Colossians & Ephesians)

Colossians 3:10: And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge (**epignosis**) after the image of him that created him:

- Vs. 5,8 – mortify evil deeds; vs. 9 – **putting off the old self**
- Vs. 18-21 – Wives submit, husbands love, children obey, fathers provoke not

Ephesians 4:13: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (**epignosis**) of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

- Vs. 1 – worthy walk ; vs. 2 – **putting off the old self**

These chapters all about walking worthy, putting away evil deeds and putting off the old self

“Your life is hid with Christ”

Colossians 3:1-17 – read

- Our life hidden, but can be found through...
- 1st - Mortifying evil desires, ie, losing our old self / life
- 2nd - Putting on new man, which is renewed in knowledge (epignosis) ie, finding our new self / life
- ALL ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH EXPERIENCE, ie, our walk

Self Denial in Paul's last 7 letters

1. **Ephesians** – Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires (Eph. 4:22)
2. **Philippians** – Consider everything a loss for the sake of Christ (Phil. 3:7-8)
3. **Colossians** – Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature (Col. 3:5)
4. **1 Timothy** – Flee from all this, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11-12)
5. **2 Timothy** – Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one entangles himself with the affairs of this life (2 Tim. 2:3-4)
6. **Titus** – 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions (Titus 2:11-12)
7. **Philemon** – Paul offers to repay Onesimus's debt, demonstrating self-denial (Philemon 1:19)

Job & True Knowledge

- Job is the ultimate example of one who experienced True knowledge (epignosis) by the hand of God
- His story an example of the walk of a believer, though he eschewed evil and feared the Lord, Job had only *the beginning of Knowledge, not True knowledge*
- The Lord will test to bring about

The “End of the Lord” – James 5:11

James 5:11 - Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the **end** of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

- This verse speaks of “true Knowledge”.
- Let’s define “end”. Greek: telos
- Receiving the **end** of your faith, [even] the **salvation of [your] souls**. 1Peter 1:9
- **End** = to complete (goal) and perfect

The “goal” of the Lord & Job

- The Lord tested Job, because He desired to impart True knowledge. His faith needed to be “perfected”
- Job only had the “beginning of knowledge”
- Job 1:1 – Job “...feared God and eschewed evil”
- Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction: (Job example of this)

Job's issue & "End of the Lord" achieved

Job 40:7-8 NIV "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? **Condemn God, justify self**

Job 42:6 NIV "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." **Condemn self, justify God = true knowledge**

A paradigm shift for Job: from gnosis to epignosis

Job 42:5 AMP "I had heard of You [only] by the **hearing of the ear**, But now my **[spiritual] eye sees You**.

- **Hearing of the ear**: conceptual knowledge, akin to gnosis
- **Spiritual eye sees You**: full, transformational, experiential knowledge, akin to epignosis

Geneva Study Bible

I have {e} heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.(e) I knew you only before by hearsay, but now you have caused me to feel what you are to me, that I may resign myself over to you.

A Zeal for God, but not according to epignosis

Job's transformational change can be related to the following:

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

Zeal: passionate enthusiasm

Knowledge: epignosis, transformative, relational knowledge

One of the greatest lessons: Self condemnation while justifying God

- Job eventually came to humble himself and justify God. He lost himself, to find himself and as a result **he found true knowledge, the "end of the Lord"**.
- **Paul** echoes - "Oh wretched man that I am" Romans 7:24
- **Publican** – "Have mercy on me a sinner" Luk 18:13
- **David** - For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink [and] are corrupt because of my foolishness. Psa. 38:4-5
- **Jacob** - I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; ... Gen. 32:10