

1 Epignōsis

- The Cure for Deception in the Last Days

2 Review

- In my last sermon, I shared how out of all the churches that the Apostle Paul started, the church that gave him the most headaches was the Church at Corinth.
- In fact, Paul visited this church several times and wrote several letters to them to encourage them to change their ways.
- So bad was this conflict that one of his visits was referred to as the “Painful Visit,” and one of his letters was referred to as the “Sorrowful Letter.”
- Nevertheless, the Corinthian Church finally did come to their senses, but not until after much grief and anguish.

3 Review

- In fact, so worried and anxious was the Apostle Paul that ministerial success in other places had little effect on him.
- But when he entered Macedonia and found Titus with a good report about the change of heart of the Corinthians, he became elated.
- And for the next 85 verses (2 Cor. 2:14 - 7:1), Paul writes some of the most inspiring praises of God’s goodness and grace found anywhere else in the whole New Testament.
- Starting off describing his feelings, Paul says, But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ . . . (2 Cor 2:14 NIV)

4 Review

- The villains or troublemakers at Corinth were a group of men whom the Apostle Paul refers to as Super-Apostles.
- These men were not like the Judaizers who insisted that Christians observe the works of the Mosaic Law, but were Gnostics or Ascetic Mystics who valued mystical spiritual encounters over and above morality and true godliness.
- While they claimed to be Christians and may have had a genuine conversion experience, they included practice and principles from the Eastern Mystery Religions in their ministry.

5 Deceitful Workmen

- So dangerous were these men that the Apostle Paul pulls no punches. He says of them . . .
- For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. (2 Cor 11:13–15 NIV)

6 Warnings

- When the Apostle Paul left Ephesus for the last time, he had a very frank discussion with the elders of that church and warned them about false teachers. He tells them . . .

- Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28–31 NIV)

7 Warnings

- In the Epistle of Jude, the Lord half brother, exhorts the Church to contend for the faith and warns them too of false prophets. He says, . . .
- For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality. (Jude 1:4 NIV)
- These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm — shepherds who feed only themselves. (Jude 1:12 NIV)
- These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. (Jude 1:16 NIV)

8 Warnings

- Even Jesus had a lot to say about False Prophets. He says, . . .
- “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” (Matt 7:15–20 NIV)

9 Warnings

- Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. (Luke 6:26 NIV)
- So in other words, one of the traits of false prophets is that lots of people like them because they tell people what they want to hear.
- For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (2 Tim 4:3 NIV)

10 Warnings

- Not so with true believers or true prophets.
- Only people in whom the Spirit is working will esteem them.
- The majority of people will, however, despise them and ridicule them.

- So then, if the world likes you there may be something wrong.
- Instead Jesus says, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt 5:11–12 NIV)

11 Jesus’ Warnings

- In fact, according to Jesus, at the end of this age there will be an explosion of false teachers and prophets.
- The reason why there will be so many false prophets in the last days is because of all the persecution and chaos that will go on.
- At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. (Matt 24:10–11 NIV)

12 Good News

- So then, how in the world can we keep ourselves from being a victim of these false prophets and false apostles—especially as we near the time of the Lord’s coming?
- Fortunately, I’ve got good news for you, that we do have a cure.
- This cure is related to what was shared at our last Celebration Service—and that was us having the “light of life.”
- You see we need illumination in our spirit about the things of God so that the smooth talk and flattery from false teachers won’t be able to deceive our minds. (Rom 16:18 NIV)

13 The Cure

- This cure I’m talking about is epignosis and it is guaranteed to lead and guide us through the Spirit into all truth.
- So powerful is this spiritual ingredient that it makes us into what is called in 1st Corinthians 2:15 a pneumatikos.
- Pneumatikos literally means, “spiritual man” and is someone who makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment. (1 Cor 2:15 NIV)
- The reason why he can do this is because he has the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:16 NIV)

14 Paul’s Preaching

- When Paul first preached to the Corinthians, he initially preached a simple Gospel message.
- My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. (1 Cor 2:4–5 NIV)
- [However, we] speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. (1 Cor 2:6–7 NIV)

15 Spiritual Dullness

- Unfortunately, Paul couldn’t share these “spiritually discerned” truths with most of the Corinthians. As he says, . . .

- Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual (pneumatikos) but as worldly (sarkinos) — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. (1 Cor 3:1–2 NIV)
- In other words, the Corinthian church was unable to receive deeper spiritual instruction because they weren't ready for it.
- Their level of maturity was keeping them from experiencing epignosis, which is the “knowledge of God.”

16 Knowledge

- There are two types of knowledge mentioned in the New Testament.
 - Gnosis which is referring to the knowledge of information and facts.
 - Epignosis which is understanding gained through experience.
 - Epignosis is often translated as “complete understanding” or “full understanding,” or simply “knowledge.”
 - However, there is a reference in 1 Timothy to something that is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. (1 Tim 6:20–21 NIV)

17 Paul's Prayers

- So important was gaining epignosis that the Apostle Paul prayed for it in several of his prayers—once he had evidence that people's faith was sincere.
- For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know (epignosis) him better. (Eph 1:15–17 NIV)

18

- And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge (epignosis) and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, . . . (Phil 1:9–10 NIV)
- For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge (epignosis) of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Col 1:9 NIV)
- I pray that you may be active in . . . your faith, so that you will have a full understanding (epignosis) of every good thing we have in Christ. (Philem 1:6 NIV)

19 Renewing of Our Mind

- Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1–2 NIV)

- While the above passage of Scripture doesn't include the word epignosis the principle is there and so is the means in which to have it.
- As we walk out our faith—holy and pleasing to God we grow in our knowledge of God (the renewing of our minds) where we are able to discern His good and pleasing and perfect will, so that we can be transformed by His Spirit.

20 **Solid Food**

- So, when we walk out our faith, we grow in our knowledge of God, which helps us to be able to discern right from wrong.
- Having this discernment we become a pneumatikos (spiritual man) and are able to receive solid food and comprehend the deep things of God.
- As it says in Hebrews, But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:14 NIV)

21 **The Whole Measure of Fullness**

- There is also another important benefit we receive when we walk out our faith and become that spiritual person who discerns all things.
- We become less susceptible to the cunning and craftiness of false teachers, prophets, and apostles.
- As the Apostle Paul says to the Ephesians, when we serve the body of Christ, we will become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:13 NIV)
- Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (Eph 4:14 NIV)

22 **Summary**

- So then, how do we become pneumatikos (spiritual people)?
 - The answer is growing in our knowledge (epignosis) of God.
- How then do we grow in our knowledge of God?
 - Walking out the elementary truths of God's word.
- Another way to put it, is as we apply gnosis we experience epignosis whereby we become pneumatikos (spiritual people).

23 **Spiritual Counterfeit**

- However, what I'm advocating is not mysticism.

- In fact the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, . . . guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, . . . (1 Tim 6:20 NIV)
- There is a counterfeit to epignosis and that is gnosticism, which is a form of mysticism that attempts to encounter the spirit world using the occult.
- So beware of people who seek altered states of consciousness that are not clearly advocated in the Bible.

24 **Meditation**

- Meditation in the Bible is to concentrate on God's word so that we may be careful to carry it out. Then we will be successful. (See Joshua 1:8)
- So when you hear people advocating that meditation is to empty our minds of all thoughts, you should be very cautious.
- Also, be very leery of people who are promoting things like contemplative prayer and contemplative worship. They might be promoting mysticism.
- If so, they might be leading people down a road that produces little in the way of spiritual fruit and real growth.

25 **Adding Virtue to our Faith**

- What helps us to grow in the knowledge of God is through the practice of virtue not mysticism.
- According to 2 Peter, God has promised us, to participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Pet 1:4 NIV)
- To achieve this, he instructs us to add to our faith the following virtues.
- Goodness, knowledge (gnosis), self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness, and love. (See 2 Peter 1:5-7)

26 **Illumination**

- When we accomplish this what happens?
 - For if you possess these qualities (virtues) in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge (epignosis) of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:8 NIV)
 - But if anyone does not have them (virtues), he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. (2 Pet 1:9 NIV)
- In other words, when we add to our faith virtue, we will be able to perceive all truth, but if we don't we'll remain an infant and be susceptible to being deceived by false prophets in the last days.

27 **Conclusion**

- People who serve in the church—putting their faith into action, grow exponentially more in their knowledge of God than those who don't.
- People who serve their community—putting their faith into action by being a good neighbor, classmate, employee, or employer, grow exponentially more in their knowledge of God than those who don't.

- People who choose to forgive and practice goodwill—putting their faith into action, grow exponentially more in their knowledge of God than those who don't.
- So then, who will be free from the deceit of the false prophets in the last days?
- Those who have oil in their lamps and have eyes that perceive, among all the confusion, the coming of their bridegroom.