

## Special Section

### ***Gnosis to Epignosis: God's Transforming Work***

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*"... be transformed by the renewing of your mind ..."*  
(Romans 12:2, NASB)

*Distinguishing between "knowledge" and "true knowledge," Chewning presents and develops the concept of the leaven of true knowledge and clearly demonstrates how this concept differs from biblical integration.*

This paper offers an expanded understanding of what is taking place in the *heart* of a believer when what is typically called *biblical integration* is taking place. (The biblical integration concept will be differentiated later and divided into two segments.) World/lifeview ideas are valuable, and those of us involved in Christian higher education certainly want to encourage and model what we call biblical integration for our students as we support their growth in developing a biblically saturated world/lifeview. After all, doesn't our faith impact our life's calling to be teachers? Are we not to demonstrate in some manner that "the mind of Christ" has not only impacted us but that a modicum of Christ's mind is also present in our heart's manifesting itself in our lives?

To help us frame our discussion of biblical integration, we need to understand the biblical view of the *heart*. We will not discuss all the elements of the model that follows. (See Depiction of the Heart on following page.) Rather, we will focus on those elements most essential to building a foundation for discussing the significant shift this paper calls for in our thinking about the nature of biblical integration.

Biblically, the word "heart" appears in the Hebrew and Greek more than 1,000 times in its singular, plural, and compound forms. It connotes, at times, the entire personality. And on other occasions it refers to one of the three components that make up the heart — the mind; the desires/affections/identity needs (reduced

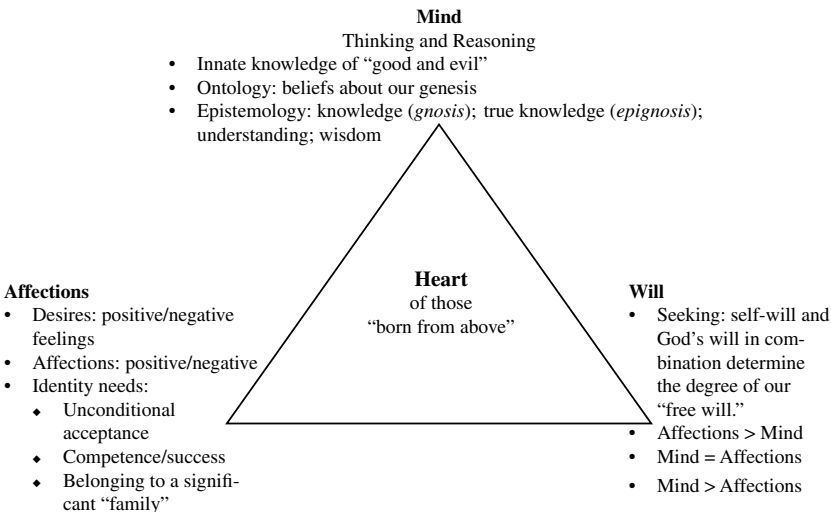
to affections in the depiction); and the will.<sup>1</sup> If we were to count the hundreds upon hundreds of times the Bible also uses words similar to mind (reason, think, know, knowledge, desires, empathy, compassion, feelings, emotions, acceptance, belong, anger, sad, cry, did what was right in their own eyes, your will not my will be done, etc.), the heart and its components are referred to thousands upon thousands of times in the Bible.

The *heart* is what God is transforming and renovating in the hearts of His children. He is renewing the hearts of those that have been “born from above.” He is at work in the hearts of those

He is giving to Christ for His inheritance. He is removing the old “hearts of stone” and replacing them with new “hearts of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19). It is important to look at how God describes His renovating work.

First, the depiction of the heart has the mind at the top of the triangle. This is intentional, not because the mind is more important than the affections or the will, but because the word *heart* is used to refer to the mind four times as often as it does to either the affections or will — mind (more than 600 times); affections (more than 150 times); will (more than 150 times). We can only surmise why this is so.

### Depiction of the Heart



God does not tell us in His Word why the Holy Spirit superintended the Bible in this way, but I would think (using my mind) this was done to impress on us that the mind is the logical avenue through which God reaches and transforms the affections and will components of our character. It can also easily be argued that the *affections* are the *heart within the heart*.

However, it is best to remember that one component of the heart should not be “bragged about” more than another component, because if there is a breakdown in the function of any of the components, the whole heart is distorted and negatively impacted.

God’s very Word, it seems to me, tells us that the mind is where God begins His renovating work in His adopted children. The book of Romans is a theologically heavy work. The first 11 chapters take us through some difficult theological concepts regarding both God and His image bearers. Indeed, God’s image bearers are presented in Romans as having terribly distorted images after the original fall. But at the conclusion of Chapter 11 there is an abrupt change in the discourse. Chapter 12 begins with the natural or logical implications that flow from all that has been said in the first 11 chapters. The Apostle Paul exhorts us:

*1 I urge you **therefore**, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your **logikos** service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be **metamorphoo** by the **anakainosis** of your **nous**<sup>2</sup> (Greek and English mixed; emphasis added).*

Let us consider carefully this Romans 12:1-2 passage. Its content is very important to the thesis of the paper. It will be stated a bit later. Given the theology covered in Chapters 1-11, Paul states that presenting our bodies to God as a “living and holy sacrifice” is our “*logikos* service of worship.” *Logikos* is the Greek word for logical, reasonable, or rational.<sup>3</sup> Paul is saying that it is logical for us to worship God by presenting our whole being to Him as a living and holy sacrifice. This is appropriate in the light of what God has done for us through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he goes on to exhort us “not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be *metamorphoo* (transformed<sup>4</sup>) by the *anakainosis* (renovation<sup>5</sup>) of your *nous* (mind<sup>6</sup>).” This latter statement is the one we want to focus on now for a moment.

What is Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, telling us to expect to undergo? What does he mean when he tells us to be transformed? He means the Christian is going to experience a metamorphous (*metamorphoo*) — be changed into a “new person.” But a person cannot metamorphose him or herself in the sense that Paul seems to have in mind. So, if it is to happen, how is it going to happen? It can only take place through a process of being renovated (*anakainosis*) by an outside agent. Moreover, what is God going to renovate in order to transform us? It is our minds (*nous*) that are to be renovated — radically changed. The mind is to go through a metamorphous. Does God tell us anywhere else in His Word anything that will lead us to a fuller understanding of exactly what is being unveiled for us in the Romans 12 passage? Yes, He does!

God makes it explicit in His Word that there are three things He renovates and metamorphoses in everyone He adopts and gives to Christ. But He only told His people *what* He transforms and renovates centuries after He had revealed to them that He had made them in His image (Early revelation: Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2;

subsequent revelation: Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). It is interesting to note that God said he would, and did, create people in His image, but He did not tell us what this meant until after the resurrection of Christ and after He sent the Holy Spirit to build up the body of Christ, the church. The two New Testament passages that clearly define the three areas of the heart that are to be transformed and renovated in the Christian’s heart are:

*... lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be **renewed** in the spirit of your **mind**, and put on the new self, which in the **likeness** [image] of God has been created in **righteousness and holiness of the truth*** (Ephesians 4:22-24, emphasis added).

*... put on the new self who is being renewed (**anakainoo**<sup>7</sup>) to a true knowledge (**epignosis**<sup>8</sup>) according to the **image** of the One who created him* (Colossians 3:10, emphasis added).

We want to pay particular attention to the Colossians 3:10 passage (the Ephesians 4:22-

24 passage does not contain a less important truth but it is not germane to the thrust of this paper).<sup>9</sup> The Colossians passage leads us to the very issue we want to address: does the phrase “biblical integration,” that the author himself uses so often, accurately portray the process by which God’s children acquire and employ the “mind of Christ?”

*Anakainoo*, the first word highlighted in the Colossians passage just quoted, is only a slight variation on the word *anakainosis* we looked at earlier in conjunction with the Romans 12:2 passage. It means to be thoroughly renovated — to be made over completely. God is telling us that *He* is going to renovate, transform, or metamorphose His people so that they *will become* the possessors of *epignosis*.

The word *epignosis* is critical to the primary thrust of this paper and is a key to the title “*Gnosis*” to “*Epignosis*:” *God’s Transforming Work*. The two key words in the title were deliberately left undefined until now (because of the veracity of our conclusions. Let me refer the reader back to the title of the paper — defining them earlier would have created more confusion than light). The word *gnosis* is the Greek word for *knowledge*. The Greek word

*epignosis*, on the other hand, means *true knowledge*. And what we want to look at now is the Bible’s differentiated use of these two words.

Do not all people, regardless of their relationship to God, possess some “true knowledge”? Why would God’s Word make a distinction between “knowledge” and “true knowledge”? Why is this distinction so important? What is the lesson to be learned from comprehending the distinction between the two words? We will answer these questions a bit later, but what is to be learned regarding this is incredibly exciting!

*Epignosis* appears in the New Testament only 19 times.<sup>10</sup> It has a special application associated with it that will become apparent as we explore the context in which it is used. It is not the literal translation of the word itself that makes it so incredibly important (become thoroughly acquainted with, know thoroughly, know accurately, know precisely, and to hold correct knowledge),<sup>11</sup> but its distinctive usage is all telling.

Of the 19 times *epignosis* is used in the Scripture, six of these times it is used to describe those who possessed “true knowledge” but who subsequently rejected or suppressed it or misunderstood it. The tragic outcome of this is

eternal separation from God. Five of the six negative examples of possessing and then discarding *epignosis* are:

*And just as they did not see fit to have God in **epignosis** (true knowledge) any longer, God gave them over to a depraved **mind** (nous) (Romans 1:28).*

*For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the **epignosis** (true knowledge) of **the truth**, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:26).*

*For if after they have escaped the defilement of the world by the **epignosis** (true knowledge) of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse than the first (II Peter 2:20).*

*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with **epignosis** (true knowledge) (Romans 10:2).*

*... always learning and never able to come to the **epignosis** (true knowledge) of **the truth** (II Timothy 3:7).*

It seems reasonable to conclude that those *not* “born from above” may on occasion have in their

mind, for a time, true knowledge (*epignosis*), but that they cannot retain it, love it, or obey it. Or they

***Do not all people, regardless of their relationship to God, possess some “true knowledge”?***

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know certain things about God but are so “off the mark” in their understanding that they pervert what they do know; but they do not have “*true knowledge of the truth*.” By its very nature true knowledge carries with it certain consequences that are either unwelcome or misunderstood in the *hearts* of those not eternally bound to Christ. Having said this, what is the nature of true knowledge and its very positive accompanying consequences? The negative illustration contained in the II Peter 2:20 passage just quoted gives us a strong hint of what this special knowledge is — “... escaped the defilement of the world by the *true knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* ...”. It is first and foremost *true knowledge about God*.

The five passages of Scripture quoted next are five of the 13 positive contextual uses of the word *epignosis*. They all point to and carry with them the same understanding: *true knowledge*

is God-imparted knowledge that *leavens the heart* regarding the character and nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

*... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the **epignosis** (true knowledge) of Him* (Ephesians 1:17).

*... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the **epignosis** (true knowledge) of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:13).

*... so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and **increasing in the epignosis of God*** (Colossians 1:10).

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **epignosis** (true knowledge) of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the **epignosis of Him** who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious*

*and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become **partakers of the divine nature*** (II Peter 1:2-4).

*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the **epignosis of our Lord Jesus Christ*** (II Peter 1:8).

*True knowledge is a thorough, precise, and accurate knowledge of God — first, of His nature and character; and second, of how He has manifested His nature and character through creation, redemption, and providence. It is true knowledge that acts as *leaven* in the hearts of His adopted children.*

It is now time to disclose the thesis that emerges logically from what has been set forth in the paper to this point:

## **Thesis**

The Holy Spirit transforms (*metamorphoo*) the person “born from above” through the renovation (*anakainosis*) of his mind (*nous*). The Spirit imparts the mind of Christ into his heart in the form of true knowledge (*epignosis*) drawn from the Word. The true knowledge acts like leaven, osmotically permeating the entire heart. The

leaven of true knowledge enlightens and transforms the person's understanding of and relationship with God that subsequently alters his relationships with other people, things, and himself.

We will break the thesis down, sentence by sentence, and analyze each sentence in order. The first sentence, "The Holy Spirit transforms the person 'born from above' through the renovation of his mind," is nothing more than the application of the Romans 12:2 passage quoted earlier. This is simply noting the reality that Paul's exhortation, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renovation of your mind," can only take place by the power of the Holy Spirit. For after all, "... it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). People cannot transform and renovate their own hearts. If we could transform and renovate ourselves, would we not all transform our hearts immediately so that we could love the Lord our God with all our heart, strength, soul, and mind? Of course we would, but we cannot. God is the *transformer* and *renovator* of the *mind* of His children.

The second part of the thesis states, "The Spirit imparts the mind of Christ into his heart in the form of true knowledge drawn from the Word." The Colossians 3:10 passage tells us that God is taking His adopted children and thoroughly renovating them so they will possess true knowledge — precise and accurate knowledge regarding Him and His conduct. And *true knowledge* is certainly what Christ possessed in His pre-incarnate and incarnate states. Indeed, it could not be theologically argued that Christ ever possessed anything other than *true knowledge*. If this is the case, then the Apostle Paul's statement that "we have the mind of Christ" can mean nothing other than the fact that those being given *true knowledge* "have the mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:16). And where else is *true knowledge* to be found other than in the Word of God, the Bible? God tells us of no other place where *true knowledge* can be found.

The question was raised earlier, "Do not all people, regardless of their relationship to God, possess *some* true knowledge?" The answer is, "No!" Only those "born from above" can *possess* and *retain* such knowledge. There were five negative biblical illustrations given



earlier where people did, for a bit of time, possess true knowledge, but their subsequent rejection of it always proved disastrous. People are far better off never having possessed it than to have had it and then turned back (Luke 9:62).

The question was also asked earlier, “Why would God’s Word make a distinction between knowledge and true knowledge?” The key is that knowledge that is *not leavened* by its rightful relationship to God, the author and creator of all that is knowable,

***God is transforming and metamorphosing what was there prior to the permeation ...***

is *imperfect, incomplete, and unfinished knowledge*. A Nobel Prize winning astrophysicist who has not connected or associated her knowledge of the universe with its Creator has unleavened knowledge, or incomplete knowledge. True knowledge is knowledge that leavens one’s entire world/lifeview. This is one reason why the distinction between true knowledge and knowledge is so important.

Another reason why the distinction between the two forms of knowledge is so important is that true knowledge, knowledge

that leavens, will be *knowledge held in humility*. The leavening process is an ongoing progressive development. The Apostle Paul was giving us true knowledge when he wrote, “... we *know in part* ... but when the perfect comes [at the time of glorification] the partial will be done away ... for now we see in a mirror dimly [Lit., in a riddle], but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall *know fully* just as I have been fully known” (I Corinthians 13:9, 10, 12). *Paul wrote this when he was full of true knowledge.*

The third assertion made in the thesis is, “The true knowledge acts like *leaven*, osmotically permeating the entire heart.” It is important to look back at the depiction of the heart diagram at the beginning of the paper and ask, “What is osmotic permeation, and how does it effect the whole heart?” Osmotic permeation is used as an analogy to depict an *entering, permeating, transforming, renovating, totally making-over* course followed by the Holy Spirit as He forms Christ in the hearts of those God the Father gives to Christ as His inheritance (Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 1:18). The true knowledge is *not* integrated into the heart. Integration strongly

implies bringing together diverse things or people and mixing or joining them together. God is not “mixing” or “joining together” old knowledge and new knowledge. God is transforming and metamorphosing what was there prior to the permeation and leavening that takes place when the *true knowledge* takes root in the *heart*.

The depiction of the heart shows what the Bible reveals. There are three components or sections comprising the heart — mind, affections, and will. The mind component is shown as containing our “Innate knowledge of ‘good and evil;’” “Ontology: beliefs about our genesis;” “Epistemology: knowledge;” “*True Knowledge*: understanding; wisdom.” As true knowledge begins to leaven one’s prior knowledge of God, God becomes one to be “feared” — One to be afraid of, in a correct sense; One to be held in *awe*. God becomes to the believer more and more like He actually is and like He has revealed Himself in Scripture. This transformation of one’s understanding of God’s nature and conduct leavens, over time, everything else one knows.

The Patriarch Joseph had leavened knowledge of God

when he said to Potiphar’s wife (after she asked him to “Lie with me”), “How could I do this great evil, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:7-9). Joseph knew that everything in the universe belonged to God and that God had appointed the proper relationships that should exist between husbands and wives. Joseph’s true knowledge of God had leavened his whole world/lifeview. And Job’s sudden enlightenment regarding God’s awesome glory and majesty, following God’s conversation with him, recorded in Job 38-41, is clearly seen in Job’s response, “I *know* that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without *knowledge*? Therefore I have declared that which I did not *understand*, things too wonderful for me, which I did not *know* ... I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eyes see Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:2-6). Job had his *mind* absolutely transformed as God opened the eyes of his heart to “see” as he had never seen before. This notion of having the “eyes of the heart” opened by God can also be found in Ephesians 1:18; Acts 26:18; and II Corinthians 4:6. Scripture is full of examples of the

*leavening effect of true knowledge* on God's peoples' understanding of first God and then His conduct.

Looking again at the heart diagram, it is easy to comprehend that as one's true knowledge of God increases, his or her ontological presuppositions regarding the origin of the universe and all of the accompanying thoughts about God's design and purpose for the universe will begin to be *leavened* and thereby changed. For example, stewardship, as a calling from God, can begin to take hold. Charity and caring for one's neighbor may take on a new meaning. Or one might suddenly realize that their affections (the lower left corner of the diagram) are being altered.

Our desires are altered by true knowledge. What God desires begins to interest the child of God more than his old selfish desires. There will certainly be struggles along the way as the *leaven* of the Word has a deeper impact on the mind of the believer, but more and more of what God desires "wins the day." Compassion, empathy, mercy, love, and other affections begin to replace the old affections of anger, faultfinding, gossip, and lying. We even begin to notice changes in what we identify with and where we want our identity

located. We find our unconditional acceptance in Christ. We begin to think of success as our being transformed into Christ's likeness by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the family of God will become more and more important to the *leavened* believer.

The will is also transformed. What God wants takes on a new meaning in the heart that has been metamorphosed by the leavening that has been brought about by the permeation of the true knowledge. It is God's will that begins to become more important. Our self-oriented will is gradually pushed aside to make room for God's perfect will. All of this and all that has been said in the preceding paragraphs is brought about by the Holy Spirit taking the Word and placing the true knowledge contained therein in the hearts of those "born from above." The leavening of the believers' minds continues as the Spirit uses the true knowledge to bring the believers' relationships and world/lifeviews more and more into conformity with the mind of Christ.

### **The Relationship between True Knowledge and Biblical Integration**

This concluding section begins with the questions: What have we historically, and unconsciously,

conceived biblical integration to be? How would we define it? Our answer might be something like this: “I know (retained in my memory) a number of biblical verses, passages, and themes; I am always collecting information from my external environment through my five senses; and I relate the external information to the biblically based thoughts and concepts I have formed over the years and mix it all together so it harmonizes with my prevailing world/lifeview. This mixing, combining, and relating of the external and internal factors results in what I call biblical integration.”

Next, we will first state and then ask: “This paper has developed and presented the concept of the leaven of true knowledge. How would I describe the leaven of true knowledge?” I would say three things.

- 1) The leaven of true knowledge is first, and most importantly, true knowledge about God — His attributes; His nature; His being; His personality, if you will.
- 2) True knowledge can only be creatively received and effectively retained in the heart of a person “born from above” through the work of the Holy Spirit.

- 3) The true knowledge
  - a) osmotically permeates and gradually leavens every belief and presupposition held in the heart, and
  - b) alters how all externally observed matters are thereafter interpreted and incorporated into our world/lifeview.

How then can we best describe the difference between the leaven of true knowledge and biblical integration? The acquirement of true knowledge is an exclusively internal, God-given, God-initiated, God-directed phenomenon. The “gift” — true knowledge — subsequently leavens all that it encounters. True knowledge is absolutely under God’s administration, and it works from the *inside* of the believer and is subsequently capable of being transmitted to the *outside*. It is an “inside to the outside” process. Biblical integration, on the other hand, is the human’s endeavor to rightly associate and combine what she or he observes in the *external* environment with what they have retained in their *internal* reservoir of knowledge. The process may or may not be aided directly by the Holy Spirit. But it is an “outside to the inside” process. *It is the “inside to the outside” event that*

*determines the correctness of the “outside to the inside” effort.*

Perhaps a consequential illustration will help at this point. Let us assume that two Christians are asked to share their thoughts on capital punishment. The first respondent reveals that she believes capital punishment has its rightful place, when rightly administered, in God’s economy in the modern world. She believes capital punishment reflects a true dimension of God’s very nature. The second respondent reveals that he believes that capital punishment should be completely done away with in today’s society; it is incompatible with what he believes is God’s true nature. Both individuals have “integrated” their worldly observations with their internal beliefs. But both sets of internal beliefs cannot be correct. One of the individuals is manifesting *pseudo knowledge* and the other individual is reflecting true knowledge about God’s true nature. [This problem is for God to sort out, not mankind.]

The differences between *true knowledge* and *biblical integration* are highlighting for me just how important the Holy Spirit is to my possessing the mind of Christ. With true knowledge, I have a meaningful component of Christ’s mind. *Without true knowledge,*

I do not possess any of Christ’s mind. This causes me to yearn all the more to truly know God and not to simply know about Him. I long all the more for the Holy Spirit to assist me in my relationship with God. This is, in its own way, an incredible incentive to prayerfully read the Word of God, asking Christ to leaven us with the true knowledge it contains so that we may grow in our true understanding of the God. Those in Christ need *the leaven of true knowledge*.

Is this not reflective of Christ’s statement: “The kingdom of heaven is like *leaven*, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, *until it was all leavened*” (Matthew 13:33, emphasis added)?

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For examples of each of these see I Corinthians 14:25; Romans 1:21; Romans 9:2; and Romans 2:5.

<sup>2</sup>All biblical references are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation.

<sup>3</sup>See *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. (5th Ed.) 2002. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. See lexical reference # 3050.

<sup>4</sup>Thayer: *ibid*, lexical reference # 3339.

<sup>5</sup>Thayer: *ibid*, lexical reference # 342.

<sup>6</sup>Thayer: *ibid*, lexical reference # 3563.

<sup>7</sup>Thayer: *ibid*, lexical reference # 341.

<sup>8</sup>Thayer: *ibid*, lexical reference # 1922.

<sup>9</sup>See Hebrews 12:3-11 where God explains that the discipline (training; not punishment) He imposes on *all* His children is for the explicit purpose of preparing them so they might “share His holiness” (v. 10) and bear “peaceful fruit of righteousness” (v. 11), the very things outlined in Ephesians 4:22-24 just quoted, when outlining what it is God is renovating as He restores people to His image. These two restorations are not elaborated on in this paper for they are not associated with the thrust of this work.

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 14:35; Acts 4:13; Acts 24:8; Romans 1:28; Romans 3:20; Romans 10:2; Ephesians 1:17; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9; Colossians 1:10; Colossians 3:10; I Timothy 2:4; II Timothy 3:7; Hebrews 10:26; II Peter 1:2; II Peter 1:3; II Peter 1:8; II Peter 2:20. The two variations on the one word are listed in Thayer's lexical as # 1921 and # 1922.

<sup>11</sup>Thayer: *ibid*, lexical # 1922. *Gnosis*, the Greek word for “knowledge,” as contrasted with *epignosis*, can be found in Thayer's lexical # 1108.

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