

Gnosis

- A. The noun *gnosis* (γνῶσις) has the following cognates:
1. *Agnoeo* (ἄγνοέω) (verb), “to not know, to be ignorant of.”
 2. *Akatagnostos* (ἄκατάγνωστος) (adjective), “above disgrace, beyond reproach.”
 3. *Anagnosko* (ἀναγινώσκω) (verb), “to read, to recognize.”
 4. *Ginosko* (γινώσκω) (noun), “doctrine perceived in the left lobe”
 5. *Epignosis* (ἐπίγνωσις) (noun), “metabolized doctrine”
 6. *Epiginosko* (ἐπιγινώσκω) (verb), “to metabolize doctrine”
 7. *Katagnosko* (καταγινώσκω) (verb), “to condemn, to scorn, to judge, to blame.”
 8. *Kardiognostes* (καρδιογνώστης) (noun), “knower of the heart.”
 9. *Akatagnostos* (ἄκαταγνωστος) (adjective), “above disgrace, beyond reproach.”
 10. *Proginosko* (προγινώσκω) (verb), “to know beforehand.”
 11. *Prognosis* (προγνωσις) (noun), “foreknowledge.”
 12. *Sungnome* (συγγνωμη) (noun), “concession.”
 13. *Gnome* (γνωμη) (noun), “opinion, judgement, intention.”
 14. *Gnorizo* (γνωρίζω) (verb), “to make known, to reveal, to declare.”
 15. *Gnostos* (γνωστος) (adjective), “known, knowable acquaintance, friend, intimate”
 16. *Gnostes* (γνώστης) (noun), “an expert, one who knows.”
 17. *Diagnosko* (διαγινώσκω) (verb), “to decide, to determine by examination.”
 18. *Diagnorizo* (διαγνωρίζω) (verb), “to give an exact report, to make known.”
 19. *Diagnosis* (διάγνωσις) (noun), “decision.”
- B. Classical Usage
1. The noun *gnosis* (from Heaclitus on) originally expressed the act of knowing through experience.
 2. It is knowledge that is derived from the *nous* (γνῶσις), which is the left lobe of the soul.
 3. It is derived from the verb *ginosko* (γινώσκω), which we dealt with in detail in the exegesis of Philippians 2:22.
 4. The concept of knowledge had a central place in Greek philosophical systems.
 5. The inscription at Delphi, *gnothi sauton*, “know yourself,” is a virtual motto.
 6. It expresses the urge to reach beyond, to know oneself.
 7. This drive characterized the Greek people for several centuries.
 8. To the Greek mind, knowledge (*gnosis*) was explicitly linked to knowing the “truth,” *aletheia*.
 9. The question of “truth” chiefly revolved around being able to distinguish between “actual” and “imitation.”
 10. Truth was reality rather than something apparent or ostensible.
 11. And for the Greeks the external object essentially expressed an underlying reality.
 12. *Gnosis* therefore was to know these ideas that belong to a superior realm of reality, a world of timeless realities which stand unchanged and unaffected by the events around it.
 13. To know this truth, this ultimate reality, was significant because the one who possessed insight into this reality also had the ability to control it.
 14. Consequently for the philosopher *gnosis* is an existential knowledge which is decisive for a person’s life and destiny.
 15. Such concepts as these formed the basis or points of contact for the later systems of gnosticism.
 16. In gnosticism, the noun *gnosis* connotes knowledge as well as the act of knowing, and it can thus be used in the absolute without any supplementary genitive, though what is meant is not knowledge generally (*episteme*) but the knowledge of God.
 17. E.D. Schmitz states that Gnosticism is a “general term denoting a manner of life which sprang from a denial of the validity of human existence in history and the cosmos. It found expression for its beliefs in a syncretistic mythology, and expressed itself in the negation of ethics” (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, volume 2, page 394).
 18. Gnosticism was an attitude to life which expressed itself in a feeling of superiority over all non-agnostics-in-Christian gnosticism, over all mere believers.
 19. In the writings of Plato *gnosis* in its concern for what really is attains to the divine, in Gnostic sources God is regarded much more exclusively as the self-evident object of *gnosis*.
 20. He is so indeed against the background of a dualism which does not accept the Greek view that the deity is beyond the world of becoming in the sense of a reality that underlies all becoming, but which conceives of

this transcendence in terms of an absolute separation from all becoming, so that we cannot discover the Godhead by a “recognitive” contemplation of the world but only by turning away from it.

21. This means, however, that the knowledge with which the Gnostics were concerned, in contrast to that of the Greeks, was distinct from all other kinds of knowledge; and this is in keeping with the restriction of *aletheia* and *ousia* to the divine reality.
 22. While *ginoskein* is for the Greeks the cultivated methodical activity of the *nous* or *logos*, fulfilled in science and particularly philosophy, the *gnosis* of the Gnostic, both as process and result, is a *charisma* which is given by God to man.
 23. It is thus radically distinguished from rational thought; it is illumination.
 24. God is inaccessible to man as such.
 25. But he knows men, i.e., the pious, and reveals Himself to them.
 26. Such *gnosis* is ecstatic or mystical vision, and to this extent knowing is still understood as a kind of seeing, though in the sense of mystic vision rather than the older Greek sense.
 27. It does not make what is seen a possession of the one who sees.
 28. On the contrary, he must pray that he may be kept in *gnosis*.
 29. Not merely the culmination of the divine vision is described as *gnosis*, but more often the way which leads to it and whose goal is *theoria* in the sense of ecstatic mystical vision.
 30. Since on this way there is imparted a knowledge which can be possessed, a medley of mythological and philosophical tradition penetrates into Gnosticism, and in certain types and strata it is hard to distinguish Gnosticism from philosophical speculation.
 31. For Plato *gnosis* was a *dunamis*, “power.”
 32. In Gnosticism it meant magical power.
 33. *Gnosis* gave the Gnostic *exousia*, “power, authority” and granted him freedom from *emarmene*.
 34. In this sense *gnosis* is a possession, though it is always in jeopardy and must be made secure by asceticism.
 35. It is so as a mysterious quality of the soul which is regarded as a substance, not as knowledge which in the act of comprehension controls the content of what is comprehended.
 36. *Gnosis* pertains to those things which we experience through the senses of the body.
 37. *Epignosis* and *gnosis* differ.
 38. The former is the complete comprehension after the first knowledge (*gnosin*) of a matter.
 39. It is bringing me better acquainted with a thing I knew before; a more exact viewing of an object that I saw before afar off.
 40. That little portion of knowledge which we had here shall be much improved, our eye shall be raised to see the same things more strongly and clearly.
 41. The distinctions are clear in the apostle Paul’s writings and is confirmed by Chrysostom who states, “You knew (*egnoute*), but is necessary to know thoroughly (*epignonai*)” (*Trench’s Synonyms of the New Testament*, page 298).
 42. Thus, *gnosis* is found in the *nous* which contains object information from perception and *epignosis* is found in the *kardia* which contains object information which has been metabolized or believed upon.
 43. Liddel and Scott list the following classical meanings for the word (page 355):
 - a. Seeking to know by inquiry, investigation, especially judicial
 - b. Result of investigation, decision
 - c. Knowing, knowledge
 - d. Higher, esoteric knowledge
 - e. Acquaintance with a person
 - f. Recognizing
 - g. Means of knowing
 - h. Being known
 - i. Fame credit
 - j. Means of knowing, hence, statement in writing
- C. LXX Usage
1. The noun *gnosis* appears 59 times in the LXX, of which 15 are non-canonical.
 2. It is much rarer than the verb *ginosko* in the LXX.
 3. It is used comparatively much more often in a spiritual and ethical sense to denote a revealed knowledge whose author is God or *sophia*, “wisdom.”
 4. God is the God of knowledge.
 5. The *gnosis* of the righteous derives from God.

6. It is a spiritual possession resting on revelation (Prv. 24:26).
 7. All capacity for spiritual knowledge is denied to the unregenerate mind.
 8. True spiritual knowledge is concealed from the wise of this world.
 9. *Gnosis* in the LXX is a technical spiritual term in antithesis to the secular *sophos*.
 10. *Gnosis* and *sophia* are frequently related, and *sophia* can even be the superior principle.
 11. In the LXX *gnosis* is divine revelation of an objective character, but under Hellenistic influence there is a plain subjective element of profound spiritual knowledge in the mystical and Gnostic sense.
 12. Thus *gnosis* may be insight into the world plan of God (Dan. 12:4).
 13. *Gnosis* is knowledge concerning God and His work which goes beyond all human comprehension and which is proclaimed for believers by the whole creation.
 14. In the LXX, *gnosis* replaces 5 different Hebrew terms:
 - a. *de`ah* (דעה), “knowledge” (1 Sm. 2:3; Ps. 73:11 [72:11]).
 - b. *da`ath* (דעת), “knowledge” (Prv. 8:9; Hos. 4:6).
 - c. *yadha`* (ידע), “know” (Josh. 23:13; Jer. 40:14 [47:14]).
 - d. *y`dha`* (עדע), “know” (Dn. 2:30 - Aramaic).
 - e. *ka`as* (כאס), “grief” (Ecc. 1:18).
- D. NT Usage
1. The noun *gnosis* appears 29 times in the NT and only once in the book of Philipians.
 2. Louw and Nida list the following meanings for *gnosis* from their research (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* volume 2):
 - a. To possess information about (page 334).
 - b. The content of what is known (page 336).
 - c. Esoteric knowledge (primarily philosophical and religious), with the implication of its being heretical and contrary to the gospel (page 337).
 - d. To come to an understanding as the result of ability to experience and learn (page 382).
 3. Bauer, Gingrich and Danker list the following (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* page 164):
 - a. Knowledge as an attribute of God and of man
 - b. Specifically of Christian knowledge
 - c. Of the heretical *gnosis* (Gnosticism)
 4. *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* (page 119):
 - a. Knowledge
 - b. Intelligence, understanding
 - c. Objective knowledge: what is known concerning divine things and human duties
 5. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* states that *gnosis* ^1108^, primarily "a seeking to know, an enquiry, investigation" (akin to A, No. 1), denotes, in the NT, "knowledge," especially of spiritual truth; it is used (a) absolutely, in (Luke 11:52; Rom. 2:20; 15:14; 1 Cor. 1:5; 8:1) (twice), (7,10,11; 13:2,8; 14:6; 2 Cor. 6:6; 8:7; 11:6; Eph. 3:19; Col. 2:3; 1 Pet. 3:7; 2 Pet. 1:5,6); (b) with an object: in respect of (1) God, (2 Cor. 2:14; 10:5); (2) the glory of God, (2 Cor. 4:6); (3) Christ Jesus, (Phil. 3:8; 2 Pet. 3:18); (4) salvation, (Luke 1:77); (c) subjectively, of God's "knowledge," (Rom. 11:33); the word of "knowledge," (1 Cor. 12:8); "knowledge" falsely so called, (1 Tim. 6:20).”
 6. There are 2 categories of *gnosis* in the NT:
 - a. Anthropocentric (Rm. 2:20; 1 Cor. 8:1; 1 Tm. 6:20)
 - b. Theocentric or Christocentric (Rm. 11:33; 15:14; 2 Cor. 2:14; 4:6; Eph. 3:19; Phlp. 3:8; 2 Pt. 3:18).
 7. The Greek concept of *gnosis* was anthropocentric whereas the Biblical concept of *gnosis* is Theocentric or Christocentric.
 8. The Christian view of knowledge is thus largely determined by the OT.
 9. An obedient and grateful knowledge of the deeds and demands of God is linked with knowledge of God and what He has done and demands.
 10. It is in keeping that this Christian knowledge is not a fixed possession but develops in the life of the believer who is positive towards the Word of God and whose soul is controlled by the Holy Spirit.
 11. *Gnosis* is a gift of grace which marks the life of the Christian by determining its expression (1 C. 1:5; 12:8; 2 C. 8:7).
 12. Christian knowledge is based upon the absolute truth of the Word of God.
 13. In relation to learning the Word of God *gnosis* knowledge is the responsibility of every believer.

14. The *Gnosis* stage is knowledge understood objectively.
15. The *Gnosis* stage cannot take place without the controlling of the Spirit or simply while the believer is in fellowship.
16. There is no application at this stage but simply the comprehension of what is being taught by the communicator of doctrine.
17. *Gnosis* includes 3 basic factors under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit:
 - a. Positive volition (Luke 8:18)
 - b. Recognition of the Authority of the Pastor-Teacher (1 Cor. 16:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17).
 - c. Concentration (Mark 4:23; Luke 11:28; 2 Pet. 1:19).
18. The *Gnosis* stage occurs in the *nous*, “left lobe,” and is when the believer is simply a hearer of the Word and not yet a doer of the Word (James 1:21-25).
19. *Gnosis* resides in the *nous* as objective biblical information.
20. It is transferred at the moment of *pistis*, “faith” through the *pneuma*, “human spirit” to the *kardia* “right lobe” where it becomes *epignosis*, “metabolized objective biblical information.”
21. Thus, there is a distinction in the Greek NT between *gnosis* and *epignosis*.
22. *Epignosis* is *gnosis* metabolized or that which is believed by the believer.
23. *Epignosis* biblical information in the *kardia* is thus a result of a non-meritorious decision by the believer which is called *pistis*, “**faith**.”
24. It becomes *sophia*, “wisdom” through its application.
25. The perceptive *apparatus* in the unregenerate is different from the regenerate.
26. A regenerate person possesses a body, soul and human spirit thus making them trichotomous whereas the unregenerate person possesses only a body and a soul making them dichotomous.
27. The body is called *soma*, the soul is called *psuche* and the spirit is called *pneuma* in the original language of the Greek New Testament.
28. The mentality of the soul is divided into 2 parts:
 - a. *Nous* (νοῦς), “left lobe of the soul.”
 - b. *Kardia* (καρδίᾱ), “right lobe of the soul”
29. Essence of the soul:
 - a. Self-consciousness
 - b. Conscience
 - c. Mentality
 - d. Emotion
 - e. Volition
30. The Essence of the Heart
 - a. The frame of reference: the entrance antechamber for doctrine (Prov. 4:4).
 - b. The memory center: the “pump” that circulates doctrine into various areas of the right lobe (Phlp. 1:3).
 - c. The vocabulary storage: the supply house for the information of thought.
 - d. The categorical storage: the supply house for the classification of thoughts.
 - e. The conscience: storage for all norms and standards (Rm. 2:15; 9:1; 13:5; 1 Co. 8:7; 2 Co. 4:2; 5:11; Tit. 1:15; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 2:19).
 - f. The launching pad: source of all mental attitude in life.
 - g. Department of growth
 - h. Subconscience-stores various categories of things that shock or impress from adversity, sin, failure or disappointment
31. The *kardia* in the Bible is the mental activity or function of the *psuche*, “soul.”
32. In the *psuche*, it “circulates” thought, mental activity just as the physiological heart does the same with blood.
33. It is the thinking part, analytical, reasoning part of the soul.
34. The *kardia* is the dominant thinking part of the soul.
35. It is the target of Bible teaching, the Word of God.
36. The *nous* is the perceptive lobe of the brain.
37. It is the left lobe or perceptive lobe and is designed for receptive comprehension.
38. The left lobe is designed to understand various types of data and to digest objective information.
39. The volition determines whether or not the objective information in the *nous* or perceptive lobe is transferred to the *kardia*, i.e., the right lobe.

40. The perceptive *process* is different in the believer who is in fellowship with God from the unregenerate and the believer who is out of fellowship with God.
41. So the perceptive process is the same in the believer who is *out of* fellowship with God and the unregenerate.
42. The human spirit in the believer was designed by God to give the believer the ability to understand the Word of God and the capacity to store it as well.
43. The Holy Spirit reveals or makes understandable the Word of God to the human spirit of the believer who is in fellowship with God.
44. He reveals or makes understandable the will of God for the believer through the communication of the Word of God.
45. The human spirit is *not* operational unless the believer is in fellowship with God.
46. The believer who is in fellowship with God has no unacknowledged sin circulating in his stream of consciousness and is permitting the Holy Spirit to control or influence his soul by means of the human spirit.
47. The *psuche* or human soul was designed originally by God to be subordinate to the human spirit.
48. The believer who is in fellowship with God permits this to take place whereas the believer who is out of fellowship does not permit this to take place.
49. The unregenerate and the believer who is out of fellowship are said to be *psuchikos*, “soulish,” whereas the believer who is in fellowship with God is said to be *pneumatikos*, “spiritual.”
50. The believer in fellowship is said to be spiritual because he is permitting the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God through the communication of the Word of God to the believer’s human spirit.
51. When an unregenerate person hears information from the cosmic system it enters his *nous* where it is *gnosis* information.
52. If he makes a decision to accept this cosmic information, it is transferred from then *nous* to the *kardia* where it becomes *epignosis* information.
53. *Epignosis* information is knowledge that is applied to the *kardia*, the dominant lobe.
54. It then becomes a part of the person’s frame of reference, their memory center, their vocabulary, and classification of their thoughts.
55. It forms their conscience where it becomes a part of their norms and standards.
56. Lastly, *epignosis* is the mental attitude of the person.
57. Now the believer who is *out of* fellowship with God goes through the same process since he is *not* permitting the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God through the Word of God and he is not enabling his human spirit to function.
58. When a believer *in fellowship* hears the communication of the Word of God it enters his *nous* where it is *gnosis* information.
59. It is transferred to the *kardia* through the human spirit where it becomes *epignosis* information.
60. The *epignosis* information though is spiritual phenomena, i.e. divine viewpoint whereas the unregenerate and the *psuchikos* believer possess only cosmic information, i.e. Satanic viewpoint.
61. When the *epignosis* information in the believer is spiritual phenomena, i.e. the Word of God becomes a part of the believer’s frame of reference, their memory center, their vocabulary and the classification of thoughts.
62. The Word of God now forms their norms and standards since it becomes a part of their conscience.
63. It also cleans out the subconscious of the believer where the everything shocking, experiences in adversities, failure and disappointment are stored.
64. The believer’s mental attitude is now based upon the Word of God as result of being in fellowship.
65. So *gnosis* information is either cosmic or divine viewpoint and likewise *epignosis* information is either divine viewpoint or cosmic viewpoint.
66. The believer must make a decision to get in fellowship and then to either accept or reject the Word of God as it is revealed to the believer’s human spirit by the Holy Spirit.