

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND ITS PRACTICAL RESULTS.

A Sermon

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“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; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”—Colossians i. 9, 10.

FOR the church that was at Colosse Paul gave hearty thanks to God for many most important blessings, especially for their faith, their love, and their hope. It would be a very useful exercise to our hearts if we would often give thanks to God for the gifts and graces which we discover in our Christian brethren. I am afraid we are more inclined to spy out their faults, and to suppose that we deplore them, than we are to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in them, and from the bottom of our hearts to give thanks to God for them. Paul felt encouraged by what he saw in the Colossian believers to pray to God to enrich them yet further. It should be our desire that our best brethren should be better, and that those who are most like Jesus should be still more completely conformed to his image. We cannot more wisely show our love to our friends than by first acknowledging the grace which is in them, and then by praying that God may give them more. Paul, as with an eagle eye, surveyed the church at Colosse, which he loved so well, and he noted that it was somewhat lacking in knowledge. The Colossian brotherhood differed considerably from the church at Corinth, which abounded in talent, and was enriched with all knowledge. The Colossians had fewer gifted brethren among them who could act as teachers, and, though this was no fault of theirs, it impoverished them in the matter of knowledge, and as Paul would not have them come behind in any desirable attainment, he therefore prayed for them that they might be filled with knowledge in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. If you read this epistle through, you will observe that Paul frequently alludes to knowledge and wisdom. To the point in which he judged the church to be deficient he turned his prayerful attention. He would not have them ignorant. He knew that spiritual ignorance is the constant source of error, instability, and sorrow; and therefore he desired that they might be soundly taught in the things of God. Not that they were destitute of saving knowledge already, for he says in the sixth

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verse that they "knew the grace of God in truth," and that they had brought forth fruits meet for salvation; but saving knowledge, though it be the most essential attainment, is not the only knowledge which a Christian should seek after. He longs to be useful as well as to be safe. Being himself delivered out of darkness he strives to bring others into the marvellous light of grace. Paul would have his brethren thoroughly furnished for sacred service, knowing the will of the Lord themselves, and able to teach others. He desired for them that they might possess comforting knowledge, strengthening knowledge, edifying knowledge, sanctifying knowledge, directing knowledge; so that they might be ready for all the trials, duties, and labours of life.

Upon this subject I am led to make four observations, and to enlarge upon each of them. May the Holy Spirit by this discourse build us up in the knowledge of God.

I. My first subject is THE GREAT VALUE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER; for as soon as Paul felt his heart burning with love to the saints at Colosse, and had heard of the work of the Spirit among them, he began to show his love by lifting up his heart in prayer for them. He did that for them which he knew would bless them.

Notice, that intercessory prayer is a very *important part of the work of Christians for one another*. We are not sent into the world to live unto ourselves, but we are members of one body, and each member is expected to contribute to the health and the comfort of the whole. It is true we cannot all preach, but we can all pray; we cannot all distribute alms from our substance, but we can all offer prayer from our hearts. In temporal things we may not be able to enrich the church for lack of substance; but if we fail to bless the church by our prayers it will be for lack of grace. Whatever you fail in, dearly beloved,—and I pray that you may in nothing come behind,—yet do not fail in prayer for all the saints, that every blessing may abound towards them.

Intercessory prayer is to be esteemed as an *invaluable proof of love*, and as the creator of more love. The man who will truly pray for me will certainly forgive me readily if I offend him; he will relieve me if I am in necessity; and he will be prepared to assist me if I am engaged in a service too hard for me. Give us your earnest prayers, and we know that we live in your hearts. How sweet it is to be permitted thus to manifest our love to one another! When our hand is palsied we can still pray; when our eye grows dim we can see to pray; when by sickness we are altogether laid aside we can still pray; and when we meet with cases in which we are unable to help, and yet are moved with sympathy for a brother, our sympathy can always find one open channel, for we can pray, and by prayer call in the aid of one whose help is effectual. Therefore, by your love to your Lord, and to all those who are in him, I beseech you abound in intercessory prayer, as the apostle did.

Intercessory prayer, again, is most valuable, because it is an *infallible means of obtaining the blessings* which we desire for our friends. It is not in vain that we ask, for it is written, "Everyone that asketh receiveth." It is not in vain that we intercede for others, for the Lord delights to answer such petitions. The unselfish devotion which pleads as eagerly for others as for itself is so pleasing to the Lord that he puts

great honour upon it. If we desire any blessing for our friends our best course is to pray: even if we would have them to be filled with knowledge in all wisdom our safest course is to pray that it may be so. Of course, we must not forget to instruct them and to aid them in their own studies as far as lieth in our power, for every honest prayer supposes the use of all proper means; but the instruction which we offer will be of no service unless we first bring down the blessing of God upon it, that thereby our friends may be made willing to learn, and may receive the truth not as the word of man, but as from the Lord himself. None but spiritual teaching will nourish spiritual life. The Holy Ghost must teach divine truth to the heart, or it will never be truly known. Whatsoever thou wisely desirest for thy friend go about to get it for him, but hasten first to the throne of grace. If thou wouldst have thy friend converted, if thou wouldst have him strengthened, if thou wouldst have him taught of God, if thou wouldst have him quickened to a nobler life, and elevated to a higher consecration, do him this great service—take his case before the Lord in prayer; and in so doing thou hast gone the wisest way to work to enrich him.

Note, brethren, for I am keeping to my text closely, that such intercessory prayer will be all the more valuable if it is our *immediate resort*. The apostle says, "Since the day we heard it, we do not cease to pray for you." He began to pray at once. Whenever you perceive the work of the Spirit in any heart, pray at once, that the holy change may proceed with power. Whenever you discover any lack in a brother begin on the day you hear of it to pray that his lack may be supplied. There should be no delaying of prayer. "He gives twice who gives quickly" is a human proverb, but I believe that when we pray speedily we shall often find that God in answering quickly gives us a double blessing. Usually he shall win worldly riches who is the most diligent in the pursuit of them, and assuredly he shall be richest towards God who is most diligent in supplication. Linger not a minute, speed thee to the mercy-seat. Now is the accepted time; the Lord waits to be gracious to thee. The Lord indicates to thee what thy prayer shall be by the news which thou hast just heard of thy friend; therefore, bring his case at once before the throne of grace. Divine providence has brought the needful subject for prayer under thy notice; therefore, this day begin to pray about it.

Our prayers will be all the more valuable if they are *incessant as well as immediate*. "We cease not," said Paul, "to pray for you since the day we heard it." "Oh," says one, "was Paul always praying for the Colossians from the day he heard of their welfare? It may have been months and years; did he never cease to pray?" I answer, he was always praying for them in the sense which he explains: he adds, "and to desire." Now, desire is the essence of prayer; in fact, desire is the kernel of prayer, and the vocal expressions which we call by the name of prayer are often but its shell; inward desire is the life, the heart, the reality of prayer. Though you cannot always be speaking in prayer, you can always be desiring in prayer. The miser is always desiring riches, though he is not always talking about his gold and silver; and the man who loves his fellow-men, and desires their profit, is really always praying for their benefit, though he is not always lifting up his voice in

supplication. "Since the day we heard it," saith Paul, "we do not cease to pray for you." The act of prayer is blessed, the habit of prayer is more blessed, but the spirit of prayer is the most blessed of all; and it is this that we can continue for months and years. The act of prayer must, from force of circumstances, be sometimes stayed; but the habit of prayer should be fixed and unvarying; and the spirit of prayer, which is fervent desire, should be perpetual and abiding. We can hardly realize the value to the church and to the world of that intercessory prayer which ceases not day nor night, but without fail ascends before the Lord from the whole company of the faithful, as the incense ascended from the altar.

Dear friends, our intercessory prayer will be all the more precious if it is an *intense expression unto God*. I suppose that by the use of the word "desire" here, the apostle not only explains how he continued to pray, but in what manner he prayed—with "desire." Remember how our Lord puts it—"with desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." I wish we could always say "with desire have I desired in prayer. I did not repeat a merely complimentary benediction upon my friends, but I pleaded for them as for my life; I importuned with God; I offered an effectual inwrought prayer, which rose from the depths of my heart to the heights of heaven, and obtained an audience with God." Fervency is a great essential for victorious prayer. God grant us to be importunate, for then we shall be invincible.

One more observation, and I have done with this. Intercessory prayer is increased in value when it is not from one person alone, but is offered in *intimate union with other saints*. Paul says, "We also," not "I only," but "*We* also, since the day *we* heard it, cease not." If two of you agree as touching anything concerning the kingdom, you have the blessing secured to you by a special promise of God. Remember how Abraham prayed for the cities of the plain, but succeeded not until Lot also added his supplication for Zoar. Then the little city was spared. I compare Abraham's intercession to a ton weight of prayer, and poor Lot's I can hardly reckon to have been more than half an ounce, but still that half ounce turned the scale. So here is Paul, and with him is youthful Timothy, who, compared with Paul, is inconsiderable; yet Paul's prayer is all the more effectual because Timothy's prayer is joined with it. Our Lord sent out his servants by two and two, and it is well when they come back to him in prayer two and two. I commend to you, brethren and sisters, the habit of frequent prayer together. When a Christian friend drops in, his visit will perhaps end in mere talk unless you secure its spiritual profit by at least a few minutes spent in united prayer. I frequently during the day, when a friend comes in upon the Master's business, say, "Let us pray before you go," and I always find the request is welcomed. Such prayers do not occupy much time, and if they did, it might be well spent; but such united supplications oil the wheels of life's heavy wain, and cause it to move with less of that creaking which we too often hear. "I alone" is certainly a good word in prayer; but "we also" is a better one. Let us link hands and intercede for our brethren and the whole church of God.

Thus have I expatiated upon the excellences which increase the value of intercessory prayer. Use much this heavenly art. It is effectual

for ten thousand ends. It turneth every way to bless the church. Brethren, pray for us, pray for all saints, pray for all sinners, and by so doing you will be the benefactors of your age.

II. Our second observation from the text is this—we learn here THE PRECIOUSNESS OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE; for all this earnest, ceaseless prayer is offered for this end, “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Here let us speak of the usefulness and blessedness of that spiritual knowledge for which the apostle and his friend cried incessantly unto the Lord.

First, consider the *men* for whom this knowledge is desired. They are saints and faithful brethren, of whom we read that they “knew the grace of God in truth,” and were “bringing forth fruit” unto God. For those who know the Lord already we must not cease to pray. They are not beyond the need of our prayers while they are in this life. We may pray for those who know nothing of the Lord, that he would open their blind eyes; but even those who have been taught of God already are in need of our supplications that they may learn yet more. We have great encouragement to pray that they may be filled with all knowledge, since the Lord has already done so much for them. We dare not say in this case that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, for a little knowledge of the things of God may suffice to save the soul; but more knowledge is a most desirable thing for those who have that little knowledge. Pray therefore for them. Let not your prayers plead only and altogether for the unconverted, but entreat for our young converts that they may be further edified. It will be an ill day when we are so engaged in seeking lost sheep that we forget the lambs. It would be very mischievous for us to neglect our work at home in order to carry on warfare with the adversary abroad. No, let us cry to God daily in prayer that the stones lately quarried may be built up upon the one foundation, and embedded in the walls of the church of God unto eternal glory. We desire life for the dead, health for the living, and maturity for the healthy. For the deeper instruction of our younger brethren let us pray.

Of this desirable knowledge, what is the *measure*? We desire for them “that they may be filled with the knowledge of his will.” “Filled”—this is grand scholarship, to have the mind, and heart, and the whole of our manhood filled with knowledge. Paul would not have a believer ignorant upon any point: he would have him filled with knowledge, for when a measure is full of wheat there is no room for chaff. True knowledge excludes error. The men that go after false doctrine are usually those who know little of the word of God; being untaught they are unstable, ready to be blown about with every wind of doctrine. If you leave empty spots in your minds unstored with holy teaching, they will be an invitation to the devil to enter in and dwell there. Fill up the soul, and so shut out the enemy. Paul desired the Colossian saints to be filled—filled up to the brim with the knowledge of God’s will. Brethren, we would have you know all that you can know of God’s truth. Rome flourishes by man’s ignorance, but the New Jerusalem rejoices in light. No knowledge of the revealed will of God can ever do you any harm if it be sanctified. Do not be afraid

of what they call "high doctrines," or the "deep things of God." They tell us that those things are secrets, and therefore we ought not to pry into them. If they are secrets, there is no fear that anybody can pry into them; but the truths revealed in the word are no longer secrets, seeing that they are revealed to us by the Spirit of God, and as far as they are revealed it should be our desire to understand them, so as to be filled with the knowledge of them.

Let us try to know divine truth more and more intimately. You know a man, for you pass him in the streets with a nod; you know another man far better, for you lodge in the same house with him; you know him best of all when you have shared his trouble, partaken in his joy, and have, in fact, had fellowship with him by blending your two lives in one common stream of friendship. When you learn a spiritual truth endeavour to know it out and out; to know its foundation and upbuilding; to know it by the application of the Spirit to your own soul so that you are filled with it. You may have knowledge in the brain, but it may not run into your spirit, so as to penetrate, and permeate, and saturate your spirit, till you are filled therewith. Oh, to get the gospel into one's entire nature, and to be like the waterpots of Cana, filled up to the brim! Lord, fill thy poor children with the knowledge of thy will!

This makes me notice what the *matter* of this knowledge is; "filled with the knowledge of his will." What is that? It means the revealed will of God. Paul would have the Colossians know what the Lord has revealed, as far as human mind could grasp it, whether it were doctrine, precept, experience, or prophecy. How well it is to know the preceptive will of God. Our prayer should daily be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Lord, teach me what is sin, and what is righteousness, that I may discern things which are excellent. Whereas there are questions in the church of God itself upon what the will of the Lord is, Lord help me not to care to know what is the will of this learned doctor, or what is the will of a certain assembly, but what is the Lord's will. "To the law and to the testimony," this is our touchstone. Our desire is to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord's will so as to do it without fail. Especially would we know the will of God, as it constitutes the gospel; for Jesus says, "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." Oh, to know his will in that respect most clearly, so as to go and tell it out on all sides, that men may know the way of life, and may be led into it by our word! Once more we read in 1 Thessalonians iv. 3: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." Oh, to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord's will till you know what sanctification means, and exhibit it in your daily life! It is yours to teach men what God means by holiness. Your mission is not fulfilled, and the will of God is not accomplished unless you are sanctified. This it is with which we need to be filled.

Know anything, know everything that is worth knowing. "That the soul be without knowledge is not good." Never attempt to run side by side with the agnostic whose glory it is that he knows nothing; but let it be your delight to know all that can be learned out of the Book of the Lord, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Concentrate your

faculties upon the will of God. Here dive into the deeps and climb up to the heights, and be afraid of nothing; ask the Holy Spirit to saturate you with truth, as Gideon's fleece was wet with the dew of heaven, as the golden pot was filled with manna, or as Jordan is filled in the time of harvest, when it overfloweth all its banks.

Still we have not done, for we must now notice the *manner* as well as the matter of this knowledge: "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Wisdom is better than knowledge, for wisdom is knowledge rightly used. Knowledge may find room for folly, but wisdom casts it out. Knowledge may be the horse, but wisdom is the driver. When a man hath knowledge it is like the corn which is laid in the barn; but wisdom is the fine flour prepared for food. We want Christian people not only to know, but to use what they know. Happy is he who knows what to do at the right time! Many people are very knowing half an hour after it is too late; but to be filled with wisdom is to be able at once to apply knowledge rightly in difficult cases. Wisdom enables you to bring your knowledge practically to bear upon life, to separate between the precious and the vile, to deal with your fellow Christians in their different conditions, and to deal with sinners and those that are without. You need wisdom so to conduct your affairs that nothing therein shall scandalize the weak, or bring dishonour upon the name of Christ; for mere knowledge will not suffice for this. Knowledge is the blade, wisdom is the full corn in the ear. Knowledge is the cloth, but wisdom is the garment. Knowledge is the timber, but wisdom hath builded her house. May all our knowledge be sanctified by grace and attended with the guidance of the Spirit that we may become wise to know what the will of the Lord is.

"All wisdom," saith the apostle—many-handed wisdom, wisdom of all sorts, wisdom that will serve you in the shop, wisdom that will be useful in the counting-house, wisdom that will aid the church of God, and wisdom that will guide you if you are cast among the vilest of mankind. May you "be filled with knowledge in all wisdom."

But that wisdom which operates without must be attended by a spiritual understanding which is powerful within. I hardly know how to explain this: it is an inward knowledge of truth, the knowledge of the inward parts of things. It is a spiritual discernment, taste, experience, and reception of truth, whereby the soul feeds upon it, and takes it into herself. We know many men who know much but understand nothing. They accept implicitly what they are taught, but they have never considered it, weighed it, estimated it, found out the roots of it, or seen the heart of it. Oh, to have in the church men full of spiritual understanding! These can say that they have tasted and handled the good word of life, and have proved and tested the truth as it is in Jesus. You know how it was with the sacrifices of old: a man who was poor brought turtle-doves or pigeons, and of these we read of each bird, "The priest shall cleave it with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder:" but a man who was rich in Israel brought a bullock or a sheep, and this offering was not only cleft down the middle, but further divided, and the fat and the "inwards" are mentioned in detail. The poorer sacrifice represents the offering of the uninstructed; they have never rightly divided the word of God, and know not its fulness of meaning;

but the man who is rich in grace is comparable to him who brought his bullock; for he can enter into detail and see the secret meanings of the Word. There is a deep which lieth under, and he that is taught of the Lord shall find it. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant;" and blessed are they that are taught of the Lord so as to read the mystery of his grace!

Here, then, is a grand petition for us. To go back to our first head, let our intercessory prayers go up for all our brethren. Lord, teach them thy word. Let them know thy book from cover to cover, and let the truths therein revealed enter into them until they are filled to the brim: then grant thou them the skill to use in daily life the knowledge which thy Spirit has imparted, and may they more and more in their inmost souls be guided into all truth, that they may comprehend with all saints what are the heights, and depths, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

III. Now, thirdly, let us see in the text a lesson concerning THE PRACTICAL RESULT OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE. Paul prays for his friends "that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." See, see the drift of his prayer—"that ye may walk." Not that ye might talk, not that ye might sit down and meditate, and enjoy yourselves, but "that ye might walk." He aims at practical results.

He desires that the saints may be instructed so that they may *walk according to the best model*. By walking worthy of the Lord Jesus we do not understand in any sense that he expected them to possess such worthiness as to deserve to walk with the Lord; but he would have them live in a manner that should be in accordance with their communion with Christ. You would not have a man walk with Christ through the streets to-day clothed in motley garments, or loathsome with filth: would you? No, if a man be a leper, Christ will heal him before he will walk with him. Let not a disciple walk so as to bring disgrace upon his Lord! When you walk with a king, you should be yourself royal in gait; when you commune with a prince you should not act the clown. Dear friends, may you know so much of Jesus that your lives shall become Christ-like, fit to be put side by side with the character of Jesus, worthy of your perfect Lord. This is a high standard, is it not? It is always better to have a high standard than a low one, for you will never go beyond that which you set up as your model. If you get a low standard you will fall below even that. It is an old proverb, "He that aims at the moon will shoot higher than he that aims at a bush." It is well to have no lower standard than the desire to live over again the life of the Lord Jesus—a life of tenderness, a life of self-sacrifice, a life of generosity, a life of love, a life of honesty, a life of holy service, a life of close communion with God. Mix all virtues in due proportion, and that is the life of Jesus towards which you must press forward with all your heart.

Next, the apostle would have us get knowledge in order that we may so live as to *be pleasing to our best friend*—"worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Is not that beautiful? To live so as to please God in all respects! Some live to please themselves, and some to please their

neighbours, and some to please their wives, and some to please their children, and some live as if they wished to please the devil; but our business is to please him in all things whose servants we are. Without faith it is impossible to please him; so away with unbelief! Without holiness no man shall see him, much less please him; therefore let us follow after holiness, and may the Lord work it in us. "Unto all pleasing"—so that we may please God from the moment we rise in the morning to the time when we lie down, ay, and please him even when we are asleep: that we may eat and drink so as to please him; that we may speak and think so as to please him; that we may go or stay so as to please him; that we may rejoice or suffer so as to please him—"walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Oh, blessed man, whose life is pleasing to God in all respects! The apostle Paul desires that we may be filled with knowledge to this very end. If I do not know the will of God how can I do the will of God? At least, how can there be anything pleasing to God which is ignorantly done without an intent to do his will? I fear that many children of God grieve their heavenly Father much through sins of ignorance—an ignorance in which they ought not to remain a single day. Be it clearly understood that sins of ignorance are truly sins. They have not about them the venom and the aggravation which are found in sins against light and knowledge, but still they are sins; for the measure of our duty is not our light, but the law of God itself. If a man pleads that he follows his conscience, yet this will not excuse his wrong-doing if his conscience is an unenlightened conscience, and he is content to keep it in the dark. You are to obey the will of the Lord: that will is the standard of the sanctuary. Our conscience is often like a deficient weight, and deceives us; be it ours to gather a clear knowledge of the word, that we may prove what is that perfect and acceptable will of God. The law makes no allowance for errors committed through false weights; when a man says, "I thought my weights and measures were all right," he is not thereby excused. The law deals with facts, not with men's imaginations; the weights must actually be correct, or the penalty is exacted; so is it with conscience, it ought to be instructed in the knowledge of the divine will, and if it is not so, its faultiness affords no justification for evil. Hence the absolute necessity of knowledge in order to true holiness. God grant us grace to know his will, and then to obey it "unto all pleasing."

Look at the text again—"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful." Paul would have us *producing the best fruit*. Without knowledge we cannot be fruitful; at least in the points whereof we are ignorant we must fail to bring forth fruit. Therefore would he have us to be right well taught, that we may abundantly produce fruit unto God's glory. He says, "fruitful in every good work"; and this means much. He desires us to be as full of good works as we can hold. Some are hindered in this because they do not know how to set about holy service. How can a man be fruitful as a preacher if he does not know what to preach? True, he may preach the elementary doctrine of the cross, but even that he will be apt to set forth in a blundering manner. For certain, a man cannot teach what he does not know. The zealous, but untaught man, would be much more fruitful if he had a clearer understanding of divine things. In

daily life, if in knowledge you are ignorant as to the things of God, you will be ready to become the prey of any false teacher who may chance to pick you up. In hundreds of ways ignorance will make you run risks, lose opportunities of usefulness, and fall into dangerous mistakes. Knowledge is food to the true heart, and strengthens it for the Lord's work. Oh, to have knowledge placed like good soil around the roots of the soul, to fertilize the mind, that thus the clusters of usefulness may be as large as those of Eshcol: beautiful, plentiful, sweet, and full. May our Lord, the King of Israel, to whom the vineyard belongs, receive an abundant reward for all his labour for the vines which he has planted.

There is another note in this verse which I beg you to notice. Paul would have them cultivate *a comprehensive variety of the best things*. He says—"Fruitful in *every* good work." Here is room and range enough—"in every good work." Have you the ability to preach the gospel? Preach it! Does a little child need comforting? Comfort it! Can you stand up and vindicate a glorious truth before thousands? Do it! Does a poor saint need a bit of dinner from your table? Send it to her. Let works of obedience, testimony, zeal, charity, piety, and philanthropy all be found in your life. Do not select big things as your special line, but glorify the Lord also in the littles—"fruitful in every good work." You never saw in nature a tree which yielded all sorts of fruit, and you never will. I have seen a tree so grafted that it produced four kinds of fruit at one time, but I remarked that it was a poor business in reference to two of the varieties; for one of the grafts, more natural than the others to the parent stem, drew off the most of the sap, and flourished well, but robbed the other branches. The second sort of fruit managed to live pretty fairly, but not so well as it would have done on its own stem. As for the third and fourth, they were mere attempts at fruit of the smallest size. This tree was shown to me as a great curiosity; it is not likely that practical gardeners will be encouraged by the experiment. But what would you think of a tree upon which you saw grapes, and figs, and olives, and apples, and all other good fruits growing at one time? This is the emblem of what instructed believers will become: they will produce all sorts of goodness and graciousness to the honour of their heavenly Father. I have no doubt that you will naturally abound most in certain good works for which you have the largest capacity, but still nothing ought to come amiss to you. In the great house of the church we want servants who will not be simply cooks or housemaids, but general servants, maids of all-work, prepared to do anything and everything. I have known persons in household employment in England who would not do a turn beyond their special work to save their masters' lives: these are a sort of servants of whom the fewer the better. In India this is carried to a ridiculous extreme. The Hindoo water-bearer will not sweep the house, nor light a fire, nor brush your clothes—he will fetch water, and nothing else: you must, therefore, have a servant for each separate thing, and then each man will do his own little bit, but he will not go an inch beyond. When we enter into Christ's church we should come prepared to wash the saints' feet, or bear their burdens, or bind up their wounds, or fight their foes, or act as steward, or shepherd, or nurse. It has been well said that if two angels in heaven were

summoned to serve the Lord, and there were two works to be done, an empire to be ruled, or a crossing to be swept, neither angel would have a choice as to which should be appointed him, but would gladly abide the will of the Lord. Let us be equally prepared for anything, for everything by which fruit can be produced for the Well-beloved.

Why is it that some are not fruitful in this comprehensive way? Because they are not filled with knowledge in all wisdom. When a man says, "You ask me to do the lowest work! Don't you know that I am a man of remarkable ability who should have higher work to do?" I venture to assert that he is an ignorant man. Self-assertion is ignorance on horseback. You have probably read of a certain renowned corporal in the American service a century ago. A general as he rode along saw a body of men endeavouring to lift timber. They were short-handed, and the work lagged, but their famous corporal stood by ordering them about at a magnificent rate. The general passed and said, "Why don't you lend them help and put your shoulder to it?" "Why, sir," said the great little officer, "how can you think of such a thing? Do you know who I am? I am a corporal!" The general got off his horse, pulled off his coat, and helped to move the timber, and by his judicious help the soldiers achieved their task. Then he turned to the high and mighty gentleman and said, "Mr. Corporal, next time you want a man to do such work as this you can send for me: I am General Washington." Just so the Lord Jesus Christ if he were here would gladly do a thousand things which his poor little servants are too great to touch. I know you, dear brother, you are too experienced, too old, too learned to help the Sunday-school! I know you are too respectable to give away a tract! Pray get out of such ignorant ways of thinking, and ask to be useful in all possible ways. If you have done a little, do much; if you have done much, do more; and when you have done more, ask for grace to proceed to the highest possible degree of usefulness for your Lord.

IV. And now, fourthly, notice THE REFLEX ACTION OF HOLINESS UPON KNOWLEDGE. We have only a few moments left; let my few words sink into your hearts. "Fruitful in every good work"—what then? "increasing in the knowledge of God." Look at that. It seems, then, that *holiness is the road to knowledge*. God has made it so. If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine. If you read and study, and cannot make out the meaning of Scripture, get up and do something, and it may be, in the doing of it, you shall discover the secret. Holiness of heart shall increase the illumination of your mind.

Will you kindly observe that *this knowledge rises in tone?* for Paul first prayed that they "might be filled with the knowledge of God's will"; but now he implores for them an increase in the knowledge of God himself. Oh, blessed growth, first to know the law, and then to know the Law-giver! first to know the precept, and then to know the mouth from which it comes! This is the height of knowledge, to see Christ and know the Father, and learn how to say from the heart, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

I would call your willing attention to another thought. The apostle, if he is to be judged according to his outward language, often utters impossible things, and yet his every sentence is not only full of deep

meaning, but is strictly correct. Notice his language here : in the ninth verse he says, "that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will." Can anything go beyond this? The vessel is filled right up to the brim, what can it have more? Yet the apostle says, "increasing in the knowledge of God." What can that mean? If the mind is full to the brim, how can it receive more? If the man is full of knowledge, how can his knowledge increase? Can there be any increase after that? I propose to you the riddle. Here is the answer of it: Make the vessel larger, and then there can be an increase. This solution of the difficulty requires no great wit to discover it. So that Paul plainly teaches us here that, if we have so increased in knowledge as to be full, *he would have us increased in capacity to know yet more*; he would have our manhood enlarged, our powers of reception increased, that we might grow from being children to be young men, and from young men to be fathers, and so may be filled—filled, always filled with all the fulness of God! The Lord grant unto us to perceive with humility, that if we are already full of knowledge, we can still advance, for we "have not yet attained." Let no man think that he can go no further. "There is," says Augustine, "a certain perfection according to the measure of this life, and it belongs to that perfection that such a perfect man should know that he is not yet perfect." To that I heartily subscribe. There is a certain fulness to be found in this life according to the measure of a man, and it belongs to that fulness that the man should know that he can yet increase in knowledge. Holy Bernard says "he is not good at all who doth not desire to be better." I also subscribe to that saying. Some might become good if they were not puffed up with the fancy of their own perfection. Others are somewhat commendable, but will never grow because they judge themselves to be full-grown already. I would have you filled, and yet have room for more: filled with all knowledge, filled with all holiness, filled with the indwelling Spirit, filled with God, and yet increasing in knowledge, in holiness, in likeness to God, and in all good things evermore to his glory. The Lord add his blessing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Colossians i.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—178, 648, 646.