

Chapter One

"THAT I MAY KNOW HIM"

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death" (Philippians 3:10; ASV).

In this matter of knowing the Lord, Paul might well have stated that his great concern was that others might know Him, that everybody should know Him. This would, of course, have been a true expression of his ministry as he traveled from place to place, and yet it would not fully have represented the one great concern which governed his whole life. He had one supreme longing, which included every other holy desire, and that was to have a better and a fuller knowledge of his Lord. Like the Apostle, we are full of joy that recently so many have come to know the Savior, and we are continuing in prayer that many more may come into this knowledge; but we are challenged by his words, "That I may know Him." How well do we know the Lord? And what price are we prepared to pay in order to get to know Him better?

We are rather surprised at Paul's confessed lack of knowledge of his Lord. If ever a man had intimate fellowship with Christ, that man would seem to be Paul. As a matter of fact the confession reveals how much he did know, for it is the man with little knowledge who thinks that he has it all. We may, perhaps, be forgiven in the first few days of our Christian life for thinking that we know it all. That is a mark of immaturity. As time goes on, however, we ought to be impressed with how very much more there is to know of Christ, as Paul certainly was.

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The words are really like a prayer, a prayer born not so much of his own desires as of a sense of what God desired. This was not his own idea, but a perception of the fact that more than anything else God wanted him to have an ever fuller knowledge of His dear Son. "That I may know Him."

In a sense this prayer is the essence of all prayer, the one great petition which includes all the lesser. We must pray for ourselves. Some people pray only for themselves, and that, of course, is very bad. It is possible, though, to get into the way of praying only for other people, and that is also bad, though perhaps not quite so bad. But what shall we pray for ourselves? What matters most? Surely it is that we may be more like our Lord. This is the essential prayer behind all prayer. Our prayers may be about personal concerns such as sickness or health, movements or jobs, or they may be about our work for the Lord, with its questions, difficulties or opportunities; but in these and many other details which go to make up life, the one prayer which should lie behind all others is that, in it all, we may learn more of Christ. That is what matters most to God, and it should therefore matter most to us.

The same basic concern should govern our united prayer. We have reached the eve of another Conference. It is quite reasonable that those who are newly among us should ask why we have these Conferences. It is also right that those who have been longest here should ask the same question, for the ones who are responsible have prayerfully to re-examine the matter before the Lord from time to time, so that we shall never fall into any dead routine. It is not just for the sake of multiplying meetings. It is certainly not to propagate any special teaching of our own. We know of no special 'Honor Oak teaching.' What we do seek is that on such occasions we may gather together around the Lord's Word to learn more of Him. That is our purpose—"That I may know Him." It may be that certain truths relating to that

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knowledge have to be recaptured or re-emphasized, truths that perhaps have not hitherto been appreciated as they should have been. What matter, so long as they lead us to an ever-deepening knowledge of Christ? That, surely, is the sure test of all ministry of the Word. Our Conferences, then, are meant to be occasions when we come together in an attempt to help one another to a richer, deeper, fuller and more vital knowledge of the Lord. "That I may know Him." Anything else is a sheer waste of time.

THE SECRET OF ALL SERVICE

This objective, far from hindering us in our work for the Lord, is the Divine secret of all true service. To "know Him" is very closely associated with knowing "the power of His resurrection." God knows, we need power! His Church needs power; His servants need power; we all need it. But in the Divine order, power for service is made to depend on this personal knowledge of Christ. Service, even if it is successful, lacks the essential thing if it is not accompanied by a true knowledge of the Lord. All service should spring from that knowledge. Not that we must allow this truth to paralyze us in our work for the Lord, vainly imagining that we cannot begin to serve until we have some deep knowledge of Him. Not at all—we learn as we serve. Learning of Christ and serving Him must go hand-in-hand; the one must never outstrip the other.

There are, of course, many perils associated with this matter of serving the Lord. We do not need to look beyond this letter to the Philippians to find those who had fallen into such perils. There were men who were earnest and busy, perhaps in a certain sense self-sacrificing, in the work of the Gospel, yet they gave way to unworthy and even vindictive feelings toward other's of God's servants. They "did not so learn Christ" (Ephesians 4:20; ASV). Paul was able to thank God for the work they were doing, but he was forced to regret the un-Christ-

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like spirit in which they were doing it, even though he himself bore them no bitter feelings. Motives may not be apparent now, but in Heaven's sight they are of supreme importance, and there must be something badly lacking in work for the Lord if it does not make the worker more like his Lord. In Philippians 2:21 Paul writes: "For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ." He was not writing about people outside of the churches; he was not even speaking of the ordinary church members, as such. Sad to say he was describing those who should have been, and in some cases had once been, his fellow-workers, and who were no doubt still busy 'in the work.' It is very easy for those who are active in service to become jealous, unkind or self-seeking, and indeed we shall fall into this peril unless we make it our first prayer "that I may know Him."

Another great peril is to be so busy in the work as to be careless as to personal relationships with the Lord whose work it is. I suppose that when the Philippians thought or spoke of the Apostle's stay among them they were most impressed by the great work which he had done in their city, but I am quite sure that Paul himself dwelt most on the new lessons which he himself had learned there. He learned more of *Christ* at Philippi—even in the dungeon, and in the grace given him, when the doors burst open, not to seek his own safety in flight, but to seek the salvation of his guard, without at the time knowing whether or not he would forfeit his own liberty in so doing. "That I may know Him": here is the safeguard from the perils associated with service. It is a purpose which will not make us work less, but will inspire us to richer service.

THE CAUSE OF ALL THE CONFLICT

Such a purpose is strongly withstood by Satan, so that to gain such knowledge Paul affirmed his need to "press on" (verses 12 and 14). One does not drift into a

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fuller knowledge of Christ, nor does one come into it by merely repeating a prayer that the Lord will empty us of self and fill us with Himself. There is more to it than that. Not that we can achieve anything by self-effort, but we need to know that the one focal point of all the Devil's attacks is to keep men from knowing Christ. He does all he can to keep a sinner from knowing Christ the Savior. When he has failed in this respect, he seems to redouble his efforts to prevent that person from entering into a deeper knowledge of the Lord to whom he now belongs.

"That I may know Him." Satan fights even the idea, by raising prejudices and suspicion at the very suggestion that there is some deeper knowledge and experience for the people of God. We only have to read of the early days of the Keswick Convention to prove this. In those days there were a few godly men—pioneers in a sense—who stressed the need for Christians to press on from the mere fact of their conversion into new heights and depths of spiritual knowledge, and they encountered every kind of misrepresentation and prejudice. It is so facile to charge other Christians with pretending to be superior; it sounds so modest to affirm one's satisfaction with 'the simple Gospel'; but may it not be, after all, that the real truth is that Satan is seeking to rob them of their full inheritance in Christ? Prejudice is one of his master weapons.

Moreover, Satan contests every practical step which will lead to such a fuller knowledge of the Lord. At every phase of Christian life, from the first stage, all along the way and right to the end, there are always practical matters which arise in regard to spiritual increase. The first of them, perhaps, is baptism. It was with the Philippians, anyhow. There is no doubt that their church was among the most vital and Christ-like of them all, and we cannot fail to be impressed with the immediate and whole-hearted way in which baptism followed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are always being faced with challenges to practical obedience.

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They may seem nothing in themselves and yet they may be the key to knowing the Lord better. For this very reason the enemy seeks to involve us in questions, arguments and delay. The only answer to him is to say: "I press on. . . ."

We always need to remember that the Devil is *unscrupulous*. There is nothing that he will not try to do if it can keep someone from knowing Christ better. Make no mistake about it—this conflict concerning an increase in the knowledge of Christ is very fierce. Satan will stop at nothing; he will use anybody or anything to turn Christians aside from pressing on with Christ. It was solemn and most striking at Wembley to hear Mr. Billy Graham close his meetings with a grave warning concerning the converts: "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on Me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck. . ." (Matthew 18:6; ASV). There was clearly a need for it to be said, concerning these newly born Christians. But is it not equally serious, all through, that we should not do the Devil's work in turning believers aside from knowing more of the Lord?

THE PURPOSE OF ALL FELLOWSHIP

This letter makes much of Christian fellowship, and it is in this setting that Paul speaks of his personal longing to know Christ better. Why do we emphasize the importance of the House of God, the Church, the life together of the saints? People will say that, if they have the Lord, that is enough: why bring in these extra things to add them on to the knowledge of Him? Why indeed, if that is what they are? It would be foolish and wrong to introduce anything extra to Christ. But church life is not that, for it is all IN Christ and moreover true fellowship together is intended by God to provide the means by which the individual believer can grow in the knowledge of Him.

Practical fellowship in the House of God may

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demand discipline, but it involves no real limitation to the individual. Of course, such fellowship requires the inward working of the Cross, and so at times it may seem to make less of us. But there is no *real* limitation. It is in the very nature of the Cross to reduce, but such reduction proves only to be God's way of enlargement. If the Letter to the Philippians stresses fellowship, it also says much about the crucified life: "the power of His resurrection" is followed by the words "and the fellowship of His sufferings." This is the way the Master went, and we find our fellowship with Him and with one another only as we go the same way. Before Paul could "press on" he had to 'let go.' And so must we. Christ, however, entered into His great fullness by His self-emptying for the glory of God. Following in the footsteps of his Lord, Paul found that great spiritual enlargement came to him by way of the Cross. It is always like that.

It is, however, negative and altogether inadequate just to say that fellowship with others will not bring us into limitation. The truth is that the discipline of fellowship will bring us into an increased knowledge of the Lord. That is what it is meant for. Both by the joys of fellowship and by its problems we are drawn closer to the Lord to learn more of Him. Those who deliberately dissociate themselves from other Christians are thereby limiting the Lord in His desire that they should know more of Him. Those who make their fellowship selective, associating only with those whom they like or with whom they agree, are really robbing the Lord of opportunities to give them a fuller knowledge of Himself.

THE PREPARATION FOR HIS COMING

The particular paragraph which we have been considering leads straight on to the declaration that "we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory. . ." (Philippians 3:20,21; ASV). The Coming is to be for us the climax, the

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last act of a process of transformation. There is nothing in scripture to warrant the idea that once we are saved we remain in a static condition, until suddenly, in a moment, we are transformed into the image of Christ, at His return. We are expected to pursue a steady course of being conformed to Him, growing in grace and in His knowledge, persistently putting off the old man and putting on the new, all with a view to that final, miraculous transformation when, seeing Him, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2).

The final act of redemption will be the deliverance from all the weaknesses and failings of our mortal bodies. We are to be given a new body of glory at His Coming, but the preparation for that Coming, and the challenge associated with it, is this matter of our knowledge of Christ in terms of likeness to Him. To Paul, deeply impressed as he was with the imminence and importance of that Coming, nothing else mattered but to know the Lord better. Everything which distracted him from that pursuit was loss and not gain; everything else in his life and service was regarded, not as an end in itself, but as a means of realizing his one great prayer: "That I may know Him." Whether we are newly converted or experienced Christians, we all need to make sure that this is the supreme purpose of our lives too.

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