

KNOWING GOD, Part 1 5-21-17

Knowing God

Jeremiah 9:23,24 *Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord.* RC Sproul, was once asked by a business man, "What is the greatest need in the church of Christ today?" Now, the answer to that type of question usually begins with, "that's hard to say," but Sproul's response was quite different. He said, "That's easy – the greatest need in the church today and in the world for that matter, is for people to know who God is." And you know, it is amazing to me that in answering such a difficult question I find a virtual consensus among the men who are my personal gurus, my spiritual heroes. They all agree with Sproul. JI Packer wrote that classic book, *Knowing God* in which he said over and over again that the priority for the Christian is to know God. AW Tozer whom I quote so often, in his fine little book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, points to our poor view of God as the greatest and root problem in the modern church. He says:

"What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at any time may say or do, but what he, in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the church. Always, the most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him. Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "what comes into your mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, we might be able with some precision to foretell where the church will stand tomorrow.

What I want you to see and understand is that the study of God on which we embark this morning is of profound importance. Charles Spurgeon, preaching in London, at the age of 20, said this:

It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a

Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity...Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the deity.

Do you know God? How would you answer that? Or maybe this question: *Do you desire to know God?* Is that a felt need in your life? A felt need is something you are aware of – e.g. the need to learn how to raise your children or how to get along with your wife or how to change the settings on your smart-phone. People are interested in these subjects because they are not only real needs, but **felt** needs. But knowing God doesn't interest them. RC Sproul says that he puts out tapes on *The Intimate Marriage* in order to gain an audience with people so that they may listen to his tapes on the holiness of God. **That** is his real passion because more than anything else that is what people really need, whether they know it or not. Now Satan is not ignorant of this. Satan knows the importance of this issue, and he works furiously to keep you away from such a study, to distract your attention and to cause you to forget what you hear. II Corinthians 10:**5a** *We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.* That implies that Satan has built fortresses against the knowledge of God. Urging folks to know God may be tough duty because we don't know how much we need it, but Satan does know. Of course, so does God who tells us in Jeremiah 9 and elsewhere says that more than anything you need to know Him. Jeremiah **9:23-24** *Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things.* The point of this passage is simply this – that what really counts, what really is of value is a knowledge of God.

I shall endeavor this day to show you why that is the case, using this text as an outline. Point One is that knowing God is important because it is essential for true wisdom. "*Let not a mighty man boast of his wisdom*" – true wisdom is in God and it is found in knowing God. Having a proper understanding of who God is, is foundational to all truth. Ephesians 4:**14** *We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.* And I believe that one of the reasons church people do get blown about by winds and upset by error is that they have no undergirdings of truth; they lack a solid theological foundation that will

hold fast in hard times. Yet people lightly, even proudly, say, “I’m not into theology. I just love Jesus.” But then, all you have to do is ask, “Who is Jesus?” and now we are talking theology. Listen friend, you are into theology. Yes you. Everybody is a theologian, everybody has a theology – it’s just a question of whether you will have a good theology or a skunky one.

The book of Proverbs says times and again that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of wisdom. It makes no sense to say that a man is wise or even smart, in the truest sense, if he doesn’t know God. It matters not how many facts he has stored away or how many P’s or D’s or M’s he has after his name. God almighty says he is a fool if he lives without knowing Him. “Know thyself” said Socrates, but it is futile to try to understand man unless you understand God. Psychology can try to reduce man to a complex machine or it can approach him as it would an advanced animal, but the pieces of the puzzle will never fit. Man is made in God’s image to reflect His glory and until you come to know something of what God truly is you will not understand man. Furthermore, you will not understand the world around you. More and more science discovers how things work, but the fundamental truths of the world’s creation and ordering by God are still only known by the man who knows God. The simple Christian who knows God understands the world better than the greatest scientist who does not.

The second reason it is important to know God is that it is essential for true power. *Let not the mighty man boast of his might.* Now, we live in day of ever-increasing information. In the church today we are swamped with an endless river of books and cds to teach Christians how to live. You are being told how to pray, how to witness, how to raise your kids, how to be a winner. Yet so little is actually being done. We have formulas for how to change the world but it’s not happening, and the reason, I’m convinced, is that we have all the how-tos but no power. You may think that preaching on God is impractical theologizing. I assure you that you are dead wrong. Nothing is more practical because the power in the spiritual life comes from knowing God. It is in our relationship with Him that we find the hatred of sin, the love of truth, the motivation for godliness that is utterly essential. And, Christian, you can know how to do this, that and the other, but if you don’t know God you’ve missed it! The Who is greater than the How. Until you know God, you will never know true holiness, never know real prayer and never know effective service. Daniel **11:32** says “*The people who know their God will display strength and take action.*” That’s what I need, and what you need – more than talk and words, you need to see things happening in your life and I am convinced that until you know God, nothing of significance ever will. Knowing Him, in truth, is essential for Christian growth. It is essential for true power.

The third reason it is important to know God is that it is essential for true riches. *Let not the rich man boast of his riches.* The man who simply knows God has much more. How do you measure blessedness? Heaven, is not on a gold standard; it is on a God standard. The more you know God the richer you are. Malcolm Muggeridge was a man who traveled the world as a renowned journalist, and came to Christ at the age of 70. 70! Clearly it's not too late for you. Listen to something he wrote:

I may, I suppose, regard myself as a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets – that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue – that's success. Furnished with money, and a little fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions – that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time – that's fulfillment. Yet, I say to you – and beg you to believe me – multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing – less than nothing, a positive impediment – measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty.

Another famous man, whose similar testimony affected me is the now-deceased basketball star, Pete Maravich. It was not until the end of his basketball career that Pistol Pete came to Christ and had a radical conversion experience. Speaking at a Billy Graham Crusade in Columbia, South Carolina just a few months before his death he said, *“Next week I'll be inducted into the Hall of Fame (he was the youngest man ever to be so inducted and, by the way, the first athlete ever to be paid over a million dollars per year)... But I wouldn't trade my position in Christ for a thousand NBA championships, for a thousand Hall of Fame rings, or for a hundred billion dollars.”* I think of myself, at the age of 13, in my back yard, dreaming of becoming what he was. Funny in a way because 15 years later he discovered that I was the one to be envied, because even at 13 I knew God.

Now, to you who don't know the Lord such talk as that must sound like pious platitudes. There is nothing I can do to convince you, but I can bear witness from my own heart and the hearts of countless others. AW Tozer has written this:

The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One. Many ordinary treasures may be denied him, or if he is allowed to have them, the enjoyment of them will be so tempered that they will never be necessary to his happiness. Or if he must see them go, one after one, he will scarcely feel a sense of loss, for having the Source of all things he has in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight. Whatever he may lose, he has actually lost nothing, for he now has it all in One, and he has it purely, legitimately and forever.

The apostle Paul, who had all that religion had to offer, said it this way in Philippians 3:8 *I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.*

Compared to knowing Christ, all else is worthless, insignificant, rubbish. Look at John 17:3. We talk so often about the blessedness of eternal life, the promise of the gospel. What is it that makes it so great? Jesus says 3 *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.* How important is knowing God? It is the surpassing value, it is eternal life. That's why I urge you to pursue it. Seek after God, to know Him. Hunger and thirst for Him. Forsake all else to know Him. Let nothing and nobody come between you and the Lord. To know Him – that is true wealth.

Finally, knowing God is important because it is pleasing to God. That is the bottom line – that is what we, as humans, are all about. 24 *But let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things.* Apparently our Creator has made us to be in a love relationship with Him. Bizarre! But true! When we know Him, He is pleased. It is His purpose in creation and it surely is His purpose in redemption. The book of Hosea is a story of rebellion and redemption. Hosea, chapter 4 tells us of God's anger at His unfaithful people. Why was He angry? Hosea 4:1 *Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land.* Hosea 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.* Hosea 6:6 *For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.* And the conclusion of the prophet is in Chapter 6 and vs. 3a *So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.* Let us press on to know the Lord; this is what pleases Him. It is as if one lover says to another, "What would you have me do for you, my darling?" And the answer of love comes back and says, "More than anything else I would have you know and understand me. For I delight in this." So, our God invites us. Shall we not then press on to know the Lord? This knowledge of God is essential for true wisdom, true power and true riches. And it is vital if we are to please our Savior and Lord.

Jl Packer writes this:

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. What is the best thing in life, bringing

more joy, delight and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God. What of all states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself.

This is why knowledge of God is important and the study of God a worthy project. I only hope that in some way these considerations have turned your real need into a felt need and that you are now as eager as a puppy for the study ahead of us. But before we go this morning, I want to briefly look at the question of how we can grow in a knowledge of God. What is the way to have knowledge of God?

As we answer that we must acknowledge that we are totally dependent on God for this. We have no hope of knowing Him unless He chooses to reveal Himself to us. But, fortunately, He has. What happens is that the Almighty Creator, the Lord of Hosts, the great God before whom the nations are as a drop in a bucket, comes to us and talks to us through the words and truths of Holy Scripture. When we study the Bible we are not studying the opinions of men, but we learn what God says to us about Himself. By reading the Bible you can know about God. But knowledge about God is not knowledge of God. You know about Donald Trump, but you don't know him. Some of you know about God, lots and lots about God, but you don't know Him. As the Bible uses this term "know" it has in mind a personal intimacy. We read in Genesis that Adam knew Eve and she conceived. That "knowing of Eve" was more than just a recognition of her existence. It was a drawing near that involves communication and bonding. My desire for you is that you know more than facts about God, that you actually know Him. Well, how do you do that? Intellectual knowledge of God is essential. If it's not in your head it won't be in your heart, but how do you translate that knowledge about God into knowledge of God? I mention three ways:

(1) First, you pray. One prayer that should always be on the lips and the heart of every believer is, "Lord, teach me of yourself. Show me more of your greatness." If you but do this as a result of this sermon I will be rewarded. The psalmist said Psalm 42:1 *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God.* Pray that you might know your God.

(2) Secondly, meditate. Meditation is the ladder by which truth goes from your head to your heart. David said to the Lord, "*I meditate upon Thee in the night watches.*" Thoughtful reflection on the truth of God can make a world of difference. The discipline of Scripture memory is a fabulous promoter of meditation, but so too is the use of good music and good reading and good listening. These things help drive what we have accepted in our minds down to our hearts. What a benefit to our souls if we learn to be still and know that He is God.

(3) Thirdly, to know God from the heart, you worship. Human beings were never meant to receive the truth about God with a ho-hum or a “very interesting.” When we learn of God it should compel us to worship. If it does not you haven’t learned it properly. GC Berkhouwer says, “*Theology should begin and end with doxology.*” “Doxo” means “glory.” “Logy” means “word.” So a doxology is a word of glory. “*Theology should begin and end with doxology*” means that our theologizing should begin with worship and end with worship. Tozer one more time:

Whatever is done without heart is done in the dark, no matter how scriptural it may appear to be. By the law of just compensation the heart of the religious trifler will be destroyed by the exceeding brightness of the truth which he touches. Tearless eyes are finally blinded by the light at which they gaze. The point is that we must study God with adoring, worshipful hearts. As you know God truly, you will worship Him, and as you worship Him truly you will know Him more. And if nothing else comes from my teaching I pray that our worship, both private and corporate will be enriched by a renewed vision of the greatness of the one we call Father. Quote together with me the words of Hosea 6:3, *So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.*

Our Father and our God, teach us of Thyself, show us Your glory, open our eyes to behold You in all of your mind-blowing beauty and wonder. Make this, our real need, also our felt need. Give us that true wisdom, that true power, that true wealth that is knowing You, and to that end shape us into prayerful, meditating, worshipful students of your Perfection.