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KNOWING CHRIST AND BEING LIKE HIM

Philippians 3:10-11

By

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August 27, 1995

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Philippians Lesson 18

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Someone has wisely pointed out, "One of the most dangerous forms of human error is forgetting what one is trying to achieve" (Paul Nitze, in *Reader's Digest* [7/92], p. 137). That is especially true in the Christian life. It's easy to get sidetracked. We need to be clear and focused at all times on what it is we're after.

What is the goal of the Christian life? If we forget it, we're not likely to achieve it. It can be stated in several forms, but in our text, the apostle Paul nicely sums up what we're supposed to be aiming at:

The goal of the Christian life is
to know Christ and to be like Him.

That's it, isn't it! Christianity is definitely *not* a religion of rules and rituals that we must work at keeping in order to climb the ladder to heaven. Rather, it is a personal, growing relationship with the risen, living Lord Jesus Christ that results in our growing conformity to Him. Our goal is to know Him and to become like Him.

1. The goal of the Christian life is to know Christ.

Jesus said the same thing when He prayed, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Christianity is primarily a growing relationship with the infinite God who has revealed Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ.

As with all relationships, it begins with an initial meeting or introduction. In Paul's case, it was not a planned or polite introduction, at least from his point of view! He wasn't seeking after Christ, inquiring as to how he could become a Christian. Far from it! "Breathing threats and murder," he was on his way to Damascus to arrest men and women who were followers of Jesus, when suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you perse-

cuting Me?" He answered, "Who are You, Lord?" The Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (see Acts 9:1-6). So Paul met the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

If we went around the room and asked husbands and wives to tell how they met their mate, we would hear many different stories. Some met each other as teenagers; others were further along in life. Some were looking for a mate at the time they met their partner; others weren't looking at all. Some met but things didn't develop between them for many months or even years. Others met and things took off like a rocket. For some it was love at first sight; for others, a long friendship led to romance and marriage. But for everyone, you began a personal relationship with your mate and because of it your life took a new direction that it never would have taken if you had not met.

It's the same with your relationship with Jesus Christ. Your introduction to the Lord Jesus may have been far different than Paul's. You may have met Christ as a young child, reared in a Christian home. Or, you may have met Him later in life. It may have been a traumatic situation, where in a moment of crisis you called out to Him and were saved. It may have been less dramatic, so that you can't even recall the exact time or place. But one thing is certain: *If you are truly a Christian, you know Jesus Christ personally.* You don't just know *about* Him; you *know Him*. You can say with Paul that He is "Christ Jesus *my* Lord."

You can know a lot about someone without knowing the person himself. I know about Billy Graham because I've read his biography and I've seen him preach on TV and in person. I've read some books he has written. I know a bit about his wife and her upbringing as a missionary kid in China. But I do not know Billy Graham because I've never been introduced to him and we do not have a personal relationship.

Becoming a Christian requires that you know some things about Jesus Christ. You need to know who He claimed to be, eternal God in human flesh. You must know some of the things He did and taught. You need to understand that He died on the cross for your sins, and that He was raised bodily from the dead. But beyond these facts, you need to know Christ personally. That relationship begins at the moment you recognize that your sins have

separated you from God and that you need a Savior. You also realize that you cannot save yourself from God's judgment through your efforts or good works. Letting go of all human merit, you call upon the Lord to be merciful to you based on the merits of the death of His Son Jesus. Your object of trust for commending yourself to God shifts from self to Christ. You are saved. You have met Jesus Christ personally.

Like any relationship, once you've met, you must *cultivate that relationship*. If you meet the girl of your dreams, but then never see her again, you won't have a relationship with her. You must spend time together, getting to know one another through conversation and shared experiences. You learn about her history, her family, her likes and dislikes, her hopes for the future, etc. If you do something to offend her, you ask her forgiveness and learn to work through difficulties in a harmonious way.

It's the same in a personal relationship with Christ. It requires cultivation and that requires time. It never ceases to amaze me how a young man and a young woman can be extremely busy, but when they meet and things click between them, suddenly they can find many hours every week to be together. What were they doing to fill all those hours before? Whatever it was, it gets shoved aside so that they can pursue this new relationship.

Do you often make time to spend with the Lord? It's sure easy for that first love to cool off, and time between you and the Lord gets squeezed out with other things. Or, it becomes your duty to have a quiet time, so you get out your Bible, grimace, and swallow a chapter a day to keep the devil away. But there wasn't any love in it. You weren't seeking to know Christ in a more intimate way. You weren't opening your heart to Him, so that He could confront you and cleanse you and make you more like Himself. There's no closeness, no intimacy.

We cannot know the Triune God except as He has chosen to reveal Himself to us. He is infinite and altogether apart from us. We can never come to know Him through philosophy or speculation. We can't know Him through our own imagination or feelings. We can't know Him through the ideas or experiences of others. We can only know Him as He has chosen to reveal Himself. That

revelation comes through His written Word which tells us of the eternal living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ (see Heb. 1:1-3).

Thus we come to know God through Jesus Christ, and we come to know Him through His Word which tells us of Him. The Old Testament points ahead to Christ; the New Testament tells us of His life, His death for our sins, and His resurrection and present reign in heaven. It also tells us of His coming again and future kingdom. It expounds on His teaching and reveals His will for His people. We can never know Him fully because He is infinite and we are finite. But we can know Him definitely as Savior and Lord and we can and must spend our lives focused on that great goal, "to know Him." But it won't happen if you aren't committed to becoming a man or woman of the Word.

But, there's a word of caution here. It's possible to gain knowledge *about* Christ through studying His Word, and yet not grow to *know Christ Himself* through His Word. In fact, you can read and study your Bible all your life and never get to know Jesus in an intimate way! In John 14:21, Jesus tells us how we can get to know Him: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him." If you don't know the Word, you neither have nor keep Jesus' commandments. But it's possible to have them through knowledge, but not keep them. If you want Jesus to reveal Himself to you, He says that you must both *have* and *keep* His commandments. So the goal of Bible study is always growing *obedience* so that we can get to know the Lord Jesus better. This leads to the second part of our goal as Christians:

2. The goal of the Christian life is to be like Christ.

When you met your future mate, fell in love and got married, your life was permanently changed. You would never be the same again. It is the same, only much more so, when you meet Jesus as Savior and Lord. He marks you for life, and the more time you spend growing to know Him, the more you are different. The rest of verses 10 & 11 shows the components and direction of the change that goes along with knowing Christ.

- A. To be like Christ requires knowing the power of His resurrection.

Paul came to know the power of the resurrected Lord when he was struck down on the Damascus Road. Even though not all conversions are as dramatic as Paul's was, all conversions do require the same mighty power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, because they all require God to raise the sinner from spiritual death to spiritual life (Eph. 2:4-6). Other Scriptures compare conversion to opening the eyes of the blind so that they can turn from darkness to light; and, to delivering captives from Satan's domain to God's kingdom (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). These are not things that can be accomplished through human persuasion or through a self-improvement program. They require the same mighty power of God that raised Jesus from the dead.

That same resurrection power is necessary to sustain the believer as he walks in victory over sin. Paul prays for the Ephesians (1:19-20) that they would know "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe [which is] in accordance with the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead" He prays for these same Christians (Eph. 3:16-17) that God "would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

In Romans 8:11 he explains, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." He means that the Holy Spirit, whose power was necessary to defeat Satan by raising Jesus from the dead, indwells every believer to give us power over indwelling sin. We experience this power as we walk moment by moment yielded to and in dependence on the indwelling Holy Spirit. If we live defeated lives, it's safe to say that we are not living in dependence on the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16). We must learn to live experientially in power of Christ's resurrection.

- B. To be like Christ requires knowing the fellowship of His sufferings.

Our Savior came to suffer for our sins on the cross. His entire ministry was marked by misunderstanding, opposition, betrayal, and death. While we can never enter into His sufferings in the same way that He suffered on the cross, there is a sense in which we can never be like Him if we do not go through suffering and learn to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Pet. 4:19; see also 1 Pet. 2:21-23; 4:13; Rom. 8:17-25; 2 Cor. 1:5).

Hebrews 5:8 makes the startling statement that "Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered." It does not mean that Jesus was disobedient and had to learn to be obedient through suffering. It means that He had never experienced the test of obedience until He suffered. His suffering for our sins on the cross was the ultimate test of His submission to the will of the Father. If we are to be like Him, we must also learn to obey God through suffering.

Unlike Jesus, we have the powerful force of indwelling sin to contend with. God uses suffering to burn off the dross and purify us. But, we have to cooperate with Him by humbling ourselves under His mighty hand when we go through trials, trusting His sovereignty over our suffering, and casting all our cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:6-11).

Fellowship points to closeness or intimacy. Though few of us American Christians know it, those who suffer because of their faith in Christ know a special intimacy with Him. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's idol, he looked and saw not three men, but four, walking in the fire (Dan. 3:25). I believe the fourth was Jesus Christ who stood with them in their hour of trial. They knew the fellowship of His sufferings.

Paul knew this fellowship. When he was preaching in corrupt Corinth, he was afraid. The Lord appeared to him in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

Although I know nothing when it comes to suffering for the sake of Christ, I had a small taste of it once when I was under attack because of taking a stand for God's truth. One night as I was

getting into bed, feeling somewhat discouraged, I was suddenly impressed with the reference, Acts 18:9-10. I was vaguely familiar with the text, but I had not been reading in Acts lately to remind me of it. I opened my Bible and read those words that directly applied to my situation. And I was flooded with joy at being able to enter, just a little bit, into the fellowship of His sufferings.

C. To be like Christ requires being conformed to His death.

This phrase is related to “the fellowship of His sufferings” and grows out of it. But it also has another dimension, which Paul describes in many other places, that of dying to sin and self through the cross of Christ. When we trust in Christ, we are placed “in Christ,” which means that we are identified with Him in His death and resurrection. But, we have to live experientially what is true of us positionally. In Galatians 2:20 Paul states, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” In Colossians 3:5, just after explaining how we have died and been raised up with Christ (3:1-4), he exhorts us to “put to death” the members of our bodies with regard to various sins (also Rom. 6:1-11 compared with Rom. 8:13).

This is what Jesus meant when He said that whoever follows Him must deny self and take up his cross daily (Luke 9:23). Jesus always lived by denying temptations to live in His own power or for His own ends. He lived only to do the Father’s will. To the degree that we learn to die to self and sin by being conformed to His death, to the same degree we grow to be like Him.

D. To be like Christ will be realized in the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:11 is literally, “if somehow I may attain to the out-resurrection from among the dead ones.” The word “out-resurrection” occurs here only. There are two possible interpretations, and it is difficult to decide between them. Paul may be expressing his hope that he will fully realize what it means in this life to experience what he has just stated, namely, the resurrection life of Christ being lived out fully through him. In favor of this view is the preceding and following context, where Paul says that he has

not yet attained it, but presses on. The uncertainty (“if somehow”) points to Paul’s humility and recognition of the weakness of his flesh. The problem with this view is, if Paul had not attained to this experience after 25 years as a Christian, who can? And, it’s an unusual use of the word resurrection.

The other view is that Paul is referring to the future resurrection of the righteous at the return of Christ, when our mortal bodies will be transformed into the likeness of Christ’s resurrection body, free from all sin. We will then share in His glory throughout eternity. “If somehow” would then not reflect uncertainty, since Paul is absolutely certain about the future resurrection (1 Cor. 15), but rather the manner in which he would attain it, whether he may still be alive when Christ returned. The problems with this view are that it doesn’t seem to fit the context quite as well as the other view and the uncertainty doesn’t fit with Paul’s certainty about the future resurrection. The strengths of the view are that the word “out-resurrection” most likely refers to the future resurrection, and is intensified to distinguish it from the normal word in verse 10; and, if it refers to the future resurrection, then verses 9-11 refer to the believer’s justification (v. 9), sanctification (v. 10), and glorification (v. 11). So, it’s hard to pick!

But whatever this verse means, other verses make it clear that the process of sanctification will be completed. We will be like Him, totally apart from sin, sharing in His glory throughout eternity (Rom. 8:17-21, 30; 9:23)! John applies this wonderful truth, “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2, 3).

Conclusion

So that’s our goal, to know Jesus Christ and to become more and more like Him. Is that *your* goal? If it is, you should have thought about it this past week. Have you ever noticed that when you buy a new car, you suddenly see that make of car everywhere? This summer, we bought a Sears luggage carrier to go on top of our car for vacation. We started seeing those things everywhere. We’ve gone on many vacations and never seen how many of those are on the road until this year. If you will set before yourself each week this goal, *to know Christ and be like Him*, you will see opportunities all over the place to apply it. You will have temptations

where you need to rely on the *power of His resurrection*. You will face trials where you come to know the *fellowship of His sufferings*. You will encounter irritations where you must learn to be more *conformed to His death*. View it all as an opportunity to know Christ and to remind you that it is preparing you for that great day when He comes and you will be raised up in glory with Him for all eternity. That's our goal!

Discussion Questions

1. How can we rekindle and maintain our first love for Jesus?
2. How can a defeated Christian learn experientially Christ's resurrection power over temptation and sin?
3. Why is a godly response to suffering so crucial for Christian growth (see 1 Pet. 5:6-11)?
4. Some say that since we are already crucified with Christ, we do not need to put ourselves to death regarding sin. Why is this not biblically balanced (see Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:1-5)?

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