

Rom. 14:19
So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another.

John 8:32 And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

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SEEKING GOD

by Tim Jennings

Knowing God is the essential pursuit of life. Now is time for the Lord to take his rightful place in our affections and be the object of our investigations. Now is time for God's people to be captivated by the Lord's infinite character and glorious works. "I want to know *Him*," needs to be the ambition which makes all other pursuits insignificant (**Phil. 3:8-10**).

It may seem strange to suggest that Christians need to consider Christ. Yet, religion has always been a respectable place to ignore God. We are constantly tempted to enthrone our own feelings and pursue our own pleasures. We end up with Christless churches filled to the brim with disciples of religious celebrities.

Is that off the mark? Just look what happens when a little "crisis" arises. We splinter in a hundred directions! Why? Because we are more acquainted with our rights than God's ways. A pursuit of the knowledge of God vaccinates us against the sickness of self-worship which lies under a thin veneer of religious justification.

I wonder, could our faith survive the transition the early church made from popularity to persecution (**Acts 2-8**)? Do we have the courage to share the gospel and start a church in a new city (**Acts 8:4; 11:19-26**)? Do we have the love to yield our rights to live in fellowship with others (**1 Cor. 8:1-13**)? Do we have the humility to serve someone vastly different from ourselves (**Acts 6:1-7**)? Or do we simply find a place we feel comfortable?

The solution to this Christless Christianity is to know the Lord. This is much more than knowing doctrines, traditions, and institutions. It is to launch into the inexhaustible journey to discover the nature of God.

This is possible because God made himself known to us. He placed his signature on Creation. He recorded his deeds and values in the Scripture. Ultimately, he

modeled his ways in Jesus, "*the exact imprint of his nature*" (**Heb. 1:3**). God wants us to know Him! So, he says, "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (**Psalms 46:10**).

To do this requires a reorientation of our reading of Scripture. The primary purpose of revelation is not human happiness or church policy, it is to know God (**Ex. 20:1; John 1:18; 5:39; et al.**)! His glory engulfs each story. His power is to be praised. His character is to be embraced.

This focus spills over into our hymns, prayers and preaching where we speak more of God than self! We do this until we recognize God is on his throne and we are on our knees. Only then will we be rightly directed by what he says and reflect who he is.

Jesus prayed, "*this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (**John 17:3**). Human movements often devolve from noble ideals into an arrogant struggle between personalities. The history of religion is no different. But rescue comes when we turn our eyes upward with a singular passion to know the Lord. This is the time to know Him!

Extra Bit:

At the base of Mount Sinai Israel thought they knew God. To them, God looked like a golden calf who was worshipped with bodily comfort, pleasure, and riches (**Exodus 32**). By the end of the day 3,000 died because their knowledge of God was corrupted. We laugh at their foolishness and sneer at their rebellion, but do we also mix our knowledge of God with tradition and cultural expectations? Israel made their "god" out of gold and fashioned him with the glory of their talent and worshipped him with the pleasures of their flesh.

But Moses took a different approach. He asked the Lord, "*Please show me your glory*" (**Exodus 33:18**).

What Moses wanted more than personal charisma and admiration from his peers was to know God. He was richly rewarded.

5 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:5-7)

Moses saw something more glorious than gold. He came to know God! The result *"Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped"* (Exodus 34:8). Israel worshiped the god of their own making and *"rose up to play"* (Exodus 32:6). Moses learned about the God of glory, and he *"bowed down to worship."* The knowledge of God was so enlivening he continued to serve the stubborn people of God with a face that shined like the God he came to know.

Tim Jennings

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"Let all you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14)

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

"A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; the Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet" (Nahum 1:2-3 NASB).

A God who is holy and separate and above all other "gods," will not, indeed cannot, brook any rival. Early in the formation of God's chosen people, Israel was cautioned about the seductiveness of idolatry. Do not serve any false god; do not erect physical forms of false gods; do not bow before them. *"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me"* (Exodus 20:5). Danger always follows when we turn away from God; God's anger is obvious; we ignore it to our detriment. Future generations can be adversely affected by the actions of

the present generation. Now, in Nahum, the consequences of idolatry are meted out against Nineveh.

Nineveh was dedicated to the worship of Ishtar, who was sometimes a male god and sometimes a female god. The god Astarte was the companion of Ishtar; later, Aphrodite and Venus (Roman and Greek mythology), modeled these early Sumerian gods. Love and sexuality were dominant themes of the gods worshiped by Nineveh. Ezekiel saw the abominations of God's people; Tammuz, a god connected to Ishtar, was believed to be the god of rain and fertile crops; instead of worshiping Jehovah at the temple, the women cried to this false god for an abundant harvest. *"Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. He said to me, 'Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these'"* (Ezekiel 8:14-15). Some suggest that the *"queen of heaven"* in Jeremiah 7:18 refers to Ishtar.

The military might of Assyria and its seemingly impregnable capital, were no match for God's power. The Creator of heaven and earth, the ultimate ruler in the kingdoms of men, would come in *"whirlwind"* and *"storm"* against Nineveh. Jehovah's feet stir clouds of dust as He approaches His foes. The seas and the rivers obey His commands. The mountains quake, the hills disappear, the rocks are reduced to pebbles. If God could create the heavens and the earth, surely He can use His creation for His righteous purposes.

Who can stand before the Lord's indignation, His anger, His wrath? Nahum's questions are rhetorical. Only the fool would presume to boldly stand before God and say: I have nothing to worry about. After all, look at the strength and might of my world; look at my gods! As the Assyrian empire waned, Nineveh summoned her gods, amassed her armies, and fought against Babylon. They lost. Now, where is that god named Ishtar?

Randy Harshbarger

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S MESSAGE

As we seek God and try to understand His character, it is equally imperative we understand his message of the gospel, which is "good news" or "glad tidings" Paul says he reveals the mystery of the gospel and that those who read what he has written can understand it (Ephesians 3:4).

Many problems in the early church as well as today are a result of not understanding the message revealed by the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Paul dealt with such a problem as he wrote to the churches in the area of Galatia. They had been deceived into believing circumcision should be bound upon all as a part of the new covenant established by Christ. He explained a principle to them as he corrected the problem. He said, *“You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”* (Galatians 5:4 NAS95).

By correcting the problem as he did, future problems could be prevented as well. He explained the difference between the Old Testament Law of Moses and the New Testament of Jesus Christ. If, indeed they rested their salvation upon the keeping of the statutes they would be falling out of the coverage of grace afforded by Jesus when He died for our sins (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 3:24-26; 5:1,2).

Now Paul actually teaches them much more than just to quit commanding their brethren to be circumcised. He tells them the source of their authority is Christ Who was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:36; Ephesians 1:20-23). Not only is He *both Lord and Christ*, but *He is head over all things to the church*. Having been elevated so by God, it is this Jesus Who will judge us in righteousness in the day of judgment. This should be sufficient for us to look to Him rather than reach back to the Law that was nailed to His cross for authority (Colossians 2:13-15).

There are many religious practices we see in religions throughout the world that have their example and beginning in the Old Testament. Many refer to the music of David to explain instrumental music in their worship. The New Testament instructs us to *make melody in our hearts to the Lord* (Ephesians 5:19).

The priestly garb we see men wear is somewhat patterned after the kind of thing the Aaronic priesthood wore. The men who wear such clothing are singled out in the same way the sons of Aaron were. Yet Jesus warned His followers against such, *“But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”* (Matthew 23:8–12 NAS95)

This same Jesus had this warning for those who insist on practicing worship according to their own wishes rather than His, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you;*

DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.” (Matthew 7:21–23 NAS95)

“While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’” (Matthew 17:5 NAS95)

If we wish to please Him and receive the reward promised to the faithful, we need to be faithful to His word.

Jim Stauffer

32,850 Sermons Later

Several years ago a reader of The British Weekly wrote this provocative letter to the editor:

"Dear Sir:

It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending a church service quite regularly for the past 30 years and I have probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered that I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister's time might be more profitably spent on something else?"

For weeks a real storm of editorial responses ensued. The uproar finally was ended by this letter:

"Dear Sir:

I have been married for 30 years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals - mostly of my wife's cooking. Suddenly, I have discovered that I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I received nourishment from every single one of them. I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago."

- **selected - Beacon Electronic Edition**

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We believe in worshiping and serving the Lord as He has instructed in His word.

Psa. 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

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THEE OUT OF MY MOUTH



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10