

KNOWING GOD: LESSON 2: THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR GOD

John 17:3

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Importance of study: truly knowing God is the absolutely MOST IMPORTANT determinant of our faithfulness, steadfastness, zeal, dedication, and happiness as Christians: Hos. 4:6

Jn. 17:3: “And this is eternal life, that they may **know You**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

2 Thess. 1:7b-9: “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who **do not know God**, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,”

2. ****** Recall last time we noted it is so important for us to correct our misconceptions of God:

☛ Doting grandfather

☛ Cosmic bug zapper

☛ Impersonal scientist

☛ Celestial Santa Claus

☛ Merlin the magician

******“The god of this century no more resembles the Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering candle the glory of the midday sun. The god who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Christian conferences, is a figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form gods of wood and stone, while millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their carnal minds. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A ‘god’ whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits naught but contempt.” (Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, pp. 28-29)

3. **3** This morning: we continue our study by describing **The People Who Know Their God**.
4. **4** Our purpose in this lesson will be twofold:
 - A. First, (1) scriptural definition of people who really know God, and, (2) encourage self-examination to determine the extent to which we fit those characteristics (2 Cor. 13:5).
 - B. Second, to encourage/motivate us in this grand quest to come to an **epignosis** of God. No shame in falling short; only shame is not examining ourselves & being determined to improve.
 - C. ****** **gnosis** versus **epignosis**:
 - (1) **gnosis**: factual knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8).
 - (2) **epignosis**: related to **gnosis**-which is more akin to knowledge in the abstract (i.e., facts) versus epignosis which denotes “exact or full knowledge, discernment, recognition,” “special appreciation for.”
 - (a) It expresses “...fuller or a full ‘knowledge,’ a greater participation by the ‘knower’ in the object ‘known,’ thus more powerfully influencing him.” (Vine)
 - (b) Explanation: I know something about being burned, that is knowledge (**gnosis**).
 - (c) But a person who has suffered third degree burns has **epignosis** of what it is to be burned (i.e., greater participation with the thing known; experiential knowledge).
 - (3) **epignosis** is used by Peter in a famous passage:

2 Pet. 1:2-3: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³ as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the **knowledge** of Him who called us by glory and virtue,”

2 Pet. 1:8: “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the **knowledge** of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **5** Knowing about God versus knowing God:

A. There’s a big difference in “knowing about God” versus “knowing (i.e., **epignosis**) God.”

Rom. 10:1-2: “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (**epignosis**). ³ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

B. ** People that “know about God” and people that “know God” can all produce the correct “scriptural formulas.” E.g., plan of salvation, worship, work, organization of the church.

C. The problem: Just because we can produce the correct “scriptural formulas” **DOES NOT** necessarily mean we truly know (**epignosis**) God.

(1) We can’t reject what the Bible reveals about patterns (see point B).

(2) **BUT**, “rote” memorization/unwavering adherence to the scriptural pattern is knowing about God (**gnosis**) and does not necessarily mean we (**epignosis**) know God (e.g., Jews).

(3) We can follow every scriptural pattern and still not know God (**epignosis**), and still not be pleasing to Him! Just because at the close of services we can look back and say, “Yes, we did everything just the same way the first century church did things,” is not necessarily going to get us to heaven! (e.g., Jn. 4:24)

D. ** Paul is a great illustration: Paul undoubtedly knew (**epignosis**) God in the fullest sense.

(1) Paul thought the “scriptural pattern” was important! **Phil. 3:16-17:** “Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”; **2 Tim. 1:13:** “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”; 1 Cor. 11:23-29

(2) But Paul’s devotion to God went much deeper than “rote” memorization and unwavering adherence to these scriptural patterns: **Phil. 3:7-10:** “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,”

(a) How well had Paul come to know God?

(i) Note that he did not go around in bitterness crying about how much he had given up for Christ. He did not exhibit to the world an attitude of dried-up stoicism:

Eph. 3:17-19: “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height; ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

- (ii) He counted those valuable things (in the world's estimation) he had given up for Christ as “*rubbish*” (NKJV) or “*dung*” (KJV) (Not merely of no value; but also he doesn't live with these things constantly on his mind, rubbing his hands and saying, “Oh, what loss I have suffered!” Nobody in their right mind has such nostalgic recollection of manure!).
- (iii) But many of us do this exact thing. Some Christians live a depressed life over past disappointments and present heartaches (as the world counts them). Paul didn't display such an attitude, because such an attitude shows that we have very little in the way of true knowledge of God.

(b) **** When we start really beginning to know God, “losses” and “crosses” no longer matter. What we have gained in Christ casts them out of our minds.**

2. **6 Other effects of knowing God:** The book of Daniel is valuable in this regard.

A. Brief background for the book of Daniel:

- (1) Daniel records events that took place during the Babylonian captivity of Judah.
 - (a) 612 B.C. Babylon overthrows Assyrian capital of Nineveh.
 - (b) 605 B.C. Babylonian armies (Nebuchadnezzar) defeat Egyptians.
 - (c) 605, 596, 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem taking captives and ultimately destroying the city and Solomon's temple.
- (2) All of these events were prophesied and came to pass as a result of the fulfillment of divine providence and the judgement of God on Judah.
 - (a) The Babylonian exile lasted 70 years.
 - (b) Daniel was a Jewish captive in Babylonian; taken into captivity in his teen years and survived the entire 70-year captivity.
 - (c) Daniel was handpicked by the Babylonians for government service.
 - (d) Daniel rose to prominence in the Babylonian court of king Nebuchadnezzar due to his God-given ability to interpret several dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - (e) His interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams gives insight into Daniel's character (i.e., Daniel gives God all the credit for his ability to interpret dreams; Dan. 2:19-23).
- (3) Daniel is one of the few Bible characters about whom nothing negative is ever written. His life was characterized by faith, prayer, courage, consistency, and lack of compromise.
- (4) **** The overall theme of the book of Daniel is God's sovereignty:**

Dan. 4:25b: “...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”

- (a) The book of Daniel was specifically written to encourage the captive Jews that God was still in control,
- (b) Their captivity, as prophesied, was not permanent; but rather, God who directs all of history in the revealing of His will, has not deserted His people, He continues to rule all the affairs of mankind,
- (c) Thus, they must continue to trust in Him. His promises of preservation and the restoration of Jerusalem were as sure as His promise of the coming of the Messiah.

B. **7 The events of the book of Daniel and Daniel and his three friend's reaction to these events demonstrate four attributes people who really know God display (i.e., *epignosis*!).**

C. People who really know God have:

(1) **** Great energy for God:**

Dan. 11:32: “Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.”

- (a) Note the actions of those who know God (“shall be strong, and carry out great exploits”) is in **reaction** to those who are against God (“Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery...”).
- (b) As long as God and His ways are being defiled and disregarded people who know God cannot rest; they feel they must take action; the dishonor done to God’s name spurs them into action!
- (c) For example, Daniel, and his three friends are continually compelled to actively stand out against the conventions and dictates of irreligion and false religion:
 - (i) In chapter one (1:8-16) Daniel and his three friends, for religious reasons, openly refuse the king’s food and insist on a diet that would not “defile” them.
 - (ii) In chapter 6 (6:4-28) when Darius suspends the practice of prayer to anything but himself for a month, on pain of death, Daniel not merely went on praying three times a day, but did so in front of an open window so that all might see (6:10).
- (d) **BUT** Daniel wasn’t a rebel. On the contrary, Daniel did what he did because he knew God! Those who know God “are sensitive to situations in which God’s truth and honor are being directly or tacitly jeopardized, and rather than let the matter go by default [they] force the issue on men’s attention and seek thereby to compel a change of heart about it—even at personal risk.” (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 28)
 - (i) Do you avoid the conversation when it turns to matters of “religion”? **Not if you know God!**
 - (ii) When brethren get involved in unscriptural practices do you hold your silence? **Not if you know God!**
 - (iii) Do you rebuke wayward brethren or “let it pass”? **Not if you know God!**
- (e) This energy for God is not only shown publicly. Indeed, it does not even start there, people who know God are before anything else people who pray, whose first expression of zeal and energy for God is expressed in prayer.
 - (i) In Daniel 9 it is said that Daniel “understood by the books” (i.e., by the Scripture) that the foretold 70-year captivity was drawing to an end.
 - (ii) How did he respond? He beseeches God in a wonderful prayer (9:1-19) where he confesses to God the great sins and shame of Judah; he confirms God’s righteousness in sending them into captivity for their disobedience to God’s word; he prays for God’s forgiveness and deliverance with passion, vehemence, and an agony of spirit to which many Christians are complete strangers.
 - (iii) By this we can test ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5). One fruit of the true knowledge of God is energy to pray for God’s cause—the more knowledge the more energy! If there is little, or no, energy for such prayer; can we truly say we know God?

(2) **** Great thoughts of God.**

- (a) The book of Daniel presents, perhaps, the most vivid presentation of the comprehensive reality of God’s sovereignty as any single book in the Bible.

- (b) By the world's standard the empire of Babylon and those that would follow (Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman) completely dwarfed Israel in power and might.
 - (i) But the book demonstrates so graphically "...that Heaven rules" (4:26).
 - (ii) That God's hand is upon history at every point and that history is in reality, God's story, the revealing of His eternal plan, "and that the kingdom which will triumph in the end is God's." (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 29)
- (c) The thoughts which filled Daniel's mind were the central truths that God taught Nebuchadnezzar in Chapters 2 and 4:
 - (i) Chap. 2: Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image w/head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly & thighs of bronze, legs of iron & feet of iron mixed with clay.
 - (ii) The image represented Babylon and three succeeding empires (Medo-Persian, Grecian, Roman),
 - (iii) In the days of the last empire God would set up His eternal kingdom, the church: **Dan. 2:44:** *"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."*
- (d) Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree that grew tall and strong and was then chopped down, but its stump was left to eventually re-grow.
 - (i) The tree represented Nebuchadnezzar.
 - (ii) He was to be humbled (chopped down) for a time until he came to a realization of who is really in control: **Dan. 4:34-35:** *"And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"*
 - (iii) In Chapter 5:18-23 God uses Daniel to remind Belshazzar the same message He had given his father Nebuchadnezzar: Dan. 5:22-28
 - (iv) In Chapter 6, Belshazzar's conqueror Darius is taught the same lesson: Dan. 6:25-27
 - (v) These great thoughts of God formed the basis of Daniel's prayers in Chapters 2 and 9: Dan. 2:20-23
Dan. 9:17-18: *"Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 'O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.'"*
 - (vi) These great thoughts of God formed the basis of Daniel's confidence in defying authority in chapter 1 (not eating defiled food) and in chapter 6 (refusing to obey Darius's decree and continuing to pray to God).

- (vii) These great thoughts of God formed the basis of the confidence of Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego when they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image in Chapter 3 (cf. vv. 16-18).
- (viii) Great thoughts of God formed the staple substance of all the disclosures God made to Daniel in chapters 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12. The truth that:
 - Dan. 4:25:** "...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."
 - Dan. 5:21:** "...the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses."
- (e) One who has great thoughts of God will realize that God will have the last word in the destiny of every kingdom, in the life of every man.
 - (i) That His kingdom and His righteousness will triumph in the end, that neither men nor angels are able to thwart His plans.
 - (ii) Such thoughts constantly filled Daniel's mind as he prayed:
 - Dan. 2:20-22:** "Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. 21 And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. 22 He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him.'"
 - Dan. 9:4, 7, 9, 14:** "... 'O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,... 7 'O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, ... 9 'To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, 14 the LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does,'"
- (f) By this we can also test ourselves.
 - (i) One with great thoughts of God has a tremendous sense of God's awesomeness, His majestic holiness, His absolute moral perfection, and His graciousness.
 - (ii) Great thoughts of God will keep us humble, dependent, awed, obedient and faithful (e.g., Heb. 10:24-25).
 - (iii) It did so for Daniel, because he truly knew God. How about us? 2 Cor. 13:5
- (3) **** Great boldness for God.**
 - (a) Daniel and his three friends were constantly sticking their necks out!
 - (i) They were not foolhardy; they knew exactly what they were doing.
 - (ii) They had counted the cost and measured the risk.
 - (iii) They were completely and fully aware of the terrific consequences of their actions if God did not miraculously intervene.
 - (b) But these things did not move them, they did not make them cower in fear. They were fully convinced that their stand was right and that their loyalty to God required them to boldly take their stand!
 - Acts 5:29:** "... 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"
 - Acts 20:24:** "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

- (c) Such was the spirit of Daniel and of Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego.
 - (i) Such is the spirit of all who really know God.
 - (ii) It does not worry them to stand out from the crowd; it does not worry them to be threatened by men.
 - (iii) It matters not to them that faithfulness may require them to face difficult consequences.
- (d) By this too we can test our knowledge of God (2 Cor. 13:5). Does it bother you to be different because of your stand for truth? Those that truly know God have a great boldness for Him!
- (4) **** Great contentment in God:** “There is no peace like the peace of those whose minds are possessed with full assurance that they have known God, and God has known them, and that this relationship guarantees God’s favor to them in life, through death and on for ever.” (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 31)
 - (a) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego demonstrated such peace when they stood their ground in the face of Nebuchadnezzar’s ultimatum: Dan. 3:15: given the ultimatum...
 - (i) Their reply is classic for someone who truly knows God and is at peace with God; is content in God:

Dan. 3:16: “*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.’*” (Courteous, “...we know God.”)

Dan. 3:17-18: “*If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 ‘But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.’*”
 - (ii) “It doesn’t matter King! It makes no difference to us! We don’t care whether we live or die! Because we are content that alive or dead God will take care of us!”
 - (iii) The peace and contentment Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had for God is the same peace Paul speaks of in Romans: **Rom. 5:1:** “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*”
 - (iv) Paul fully analyzes the substance of this peace in Romans 8:1, 16-17, 28, **30-39**
 - v. 1:** “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*”
 - vv. 16-17:** “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*”
 - v. 28:** “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*”
 - (b) By this too we can test our knowledge of God.
 - (i) The comprehensiveness of our contentment is another measure of how well we really know God (Phil. 4:11).
 - (ii) Are you content in God? Do you agree with Paul? 2 Cor. 13:5

III. CONCLUSION: 8

1. We all have room to grow (2 Cor. 13:5). Let us all have the desire to really know God (*epignosis*); that we all might “*give all diligence*” to have:

- ☛ **Great energy for God,**
- ☛ **Great thoughts of God,**
- ☛ **Great boldness for God,**
- ☛ **Great contentment in God.**

2. If we have this desire two things **must** follow:

- A. Recognition that we have much work to do, because our knowledge of God is lacking.

- (1) We must learn to measure ourselves not just in the fact that we diligently follow the NT pattern in such things as the plan of salvation and the work and worship of the church.
- (2) But we must also measure ourselves by how we pray and what goes on in our hearts. We need to pray like Daniel!

Jas. 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

- B. Second, we must **truly** seek the Savior:

Phil. 3:8-10: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,”

Phil. 3:14: “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

When we know Jesus, we know God, when we walk with Jesus we walk with God!

3. Lord willing we will continue our study, Knowing God, next Lord's Day.
4. Invitation

Some of the material in this sermon is
from Knowing God, J. I. Packer