

Gaining Christ – Knowing Him – Sanctification

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death

“For millions of Christians, nevertheless, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle.

Over against all this cloudy vagueness stands the clear scriptural doctrine that God can be known in personal experience. A loving Personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living Person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself whenever and wherever His people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation. The Bible assumes as a self-evident fact that men can know God with at least the same degree of immediacy as they know any other person or thing that comes within the field of their experience.” - A. W. Tozer.

It is amazing how many people claim to be Christians, but are uninterested in actually knowing God. They seem to be more interested in spiritual life insurance, making sure nothing bad happens to them when they die. But as for this life, they are mostly unconcerned with who God is, what He is like.

“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.” -Spurgoen

For Paul, this was what the Christian life was. It was knowing and loving God. And here in Philippians 3, he makes it clear that he has given up anything that would hinder him from gaining Christ, experiencing and knowing and loving God.

Paul shows us that gaining Christ and being found in Him comes in three forms: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification is gaining Christ through forgiveness of sin and the imputation of His righteousness. The penalty and punishment for your sins is removed, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to you. You are now found in Christ, with a new position, a new, eternal status.

But bound to that justification is the next phase, the present-tense experience of gaining Christ, and that is sanctification. Sanctification is the Christian life. Sanctification is your now experience of loving God, worshipping Him, becoming more like Christ, of spiritual growth.

Justification is in the past, and you either have it or you don't. Justification is a past event that has present-tense effects, but it is a one-time event when you receive Christ by faith. Glorification is a future event. It is drawing nearer every day, and its hope is to affect you in the present, but it is still all future. But sanctification is where you are. This is where you are place your focus, because this is the Christian life. Verse 10 is the verse that has created so many songs, and people have memorised it, because it captures the Christian life in one verse.

Now something about the grammar of this passage. On the surface, it looks as if Paul is saying he wants to know three things: Him, the power of His resurrection and third, the fellowship of His sufferings. But actually, these three phrases are not parallel. Knowing Christ is the dominant phrase,

while power of resurrection and fellowship of sufferings, explain how this knowing takes place, or what it entails, while the last phrase explains the position that makes it possible. So, we'll examine Paul's one-verse summary of sanctification by looking at the point of sanctification, the process of sanctification, and the position of sanctification.

I. The Point of Sanctification: Knowing Him

that I may know Him

At the very head of what Paul desires is the simple and beautiful phrase, that I may know Him. He has already said this in verse 8, when he spoke of the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ as Lord.

In some ways, justification is preliminary. It is what must happen before you get to the real point. And the real point of the Christian life is not simply to be justified, to be forgiven of your sins. The real point is to know Him. Any gospel that presents only the need to be justified may be guilty of presenting an incomplete gospel. Because the big idea of the gospel is not just to be forgiven and go to Heaven. The real point of the gospel is to come to know this glorious God and to live in fellowship with Him forever.

That I may know Him. The word *know*, in almost every language, has a wide range of meanings. It can mean simple ideas which you hear, accept and agree with. It can mean knowing through reason and logic, where you know by deduction or inference. It can mean to experience and understand from experience. What does Paul mean when He talks about knowing Christ?

Knowing Christ, for Paul is not cold, mental, information gathering. It is personal, experiential knowledge. It is the knowledge of knowing another Person by being in that Person's presence.

In another Scripture, Paul uses the same vocabulary of knowing and glory, and there makes it graphically clear as to what he means by knowing Christ. It is in 2 Corinthians 3, going into chapter 4, with a focus 3:18 and 4:6.

2 Corinthians 3:6–4:4

⁶who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, ⁸how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? ⁹For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. ¹⁰For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. ¹²Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—¹³unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.** ¹Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ²But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. ⁶**For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

Now it is important to understand the Old Testament imagery here. In that chapter, Paul is contrasting old covenant life with the new covenant life of the Christian. His model for contrasting the two is Moses. Moses, the very best of Old Testament saints. Moses would go in to the Tabernacle and there commune with God, spend time in His presence, worshipping God, talking to Him, hearing His Word. In that Tabernacle we read that Moses spoke to God as face to face. The exposure to God's beauty and person actually gave Moses' skin a glow, a shine that lasted even when he left the Tabernacle.

But such was the nature of the old covenant, that everything was temporary. Remember how the writer of Hebrews points out that the sacrifices had to be repeated every year, and the Day of Atonement had to happen every year, and the priests had to be replaced because of age. Why? Because the old covenant was a shadow, a forerunner, a signpost to the reality, the fulfillment, the substance in Christ.

In exactly the same way, the glow on Moses' face was temporary. It would fade, and He had to go back into the Tabernacle for that glow to be renewed. And Moses did not want the people distracted by the fading glow on his face, because they could have misunderstood all sorts of things about it. So Moses had to veil the glory, because he had to renew it repeatedly.

Paul says in new covenant sanctification, we don't use a veil. Instead, we get to see the same glory that Moses saw, but in our case, the glory does not fade. Ours goes from glory to glory. The glory increases.

But wait, what does that mean? We are not going into the Tabernacle and seeing the Shekhina glory hovering over the Ark. Our faces don't literally shine. So what does Paul mean? Notice a few things. What we behold, where we behold it, and how we behold it. First, we do behold the glory of the Lord (3:18), and this glory is seen in the face of Jesus Christ (4:4). To see the glory of God in its clearest form is to see the Son of God.

Second, notice where we see this light. 3:18 tells us that we behold as in a mirror. Remember Paul uses this same phrase in 1 Corinthians 13:12, when he says, “
¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

In other words, we still see the glory of God in a reflected form, not face to face, as we one day will. Verse 6 tells you that the shining of this light is not something your eyes see. who has shone in our hearts You behold this glory in the inner man, in the mind and heart, what Paul calls the eyes of your heart.

Third, look at how it happens. Verse 18 tells us it is by the Spirit of the Lord. Verse 6 tells us God commands the light to shine in our hearts. The Holy Spirit is the one who shines the glory of God to the eyes of your heart. As He does so, you are transformed into the same image as Jesus. You take on the same character, the same words, thoughts, deeds, desires, attitudes. You are transformed, and this is not stop-start, but progressive growth. From one degree of glory to another.

This is at the very heart of sanctification. You seek to know the person of God, the living glorious nature of who he is. As you do that, the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and shows you the glory of God in the Son of God.

Now, how does this take place?

II. The Process of Sanctification: Dying and Rising

and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings

The way to understand this phrase is that Paul is saying, I will know Christ by knowing the power of his resurrection as he participates in Christ's sufferings. The power of resurrection is grammatically linked to fellowship of suffering. You can't have one without the other. They are two sides of one coin. The Christian life, sanctification will be an experience of power of Christ on the one hand, and fellowship with Christ on the other hand. It is the J-Curve, the experience of Christ as we go down with Him into suffering, and the experience of Christ as we come up with Him in resurrection.

Let me first explain what these are, and then we can understand how they help us know Christ.

Let me begin with the second phrase: "the fellowship of His sufferings". We share the sufferings of Christ, and in that sharing, we are experiencing and knowing Christ. How so?

The Christian life is a life where God will teach us by humbling us. That humbling will come in several forms. It will come in the form of self-denial. Every time you say no to sin, you are denying your flesh, starving it, killing it, while it is crying out to be fed, crying out for you to give in to the temptation. But every self-denial is sharing in the sufferings of Christ, who denied Himself in so many ways so as to pay for our sins.

It will also come in the form of sacrifice. Quite apart from sin, the Christian life will be a call to sacrifice and give what costs. It might be time, or money, or opportunity, or relationships, or career advancement, or comforts, or conveniences, or familiarity. But when you know it is called for, or when it is needed, or when you desire to sacrifice, then you are experiencing and sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Christ's whole mission was sacrifice, and every sacrifice you make out of love is part of that suffering.

It will also come in the form of unasked for suffering. This will be pain inflicted upon you from the outside. Financial strain, unkindness from others, slander, physical disability, death of loved ones, painful loss, ruined business or reputation, abuse from others. This suffering is also sharing in Christ's suffering, because His suffering came at Him though He didn't earn it or deserve it.

Now every time you experience or purposefully choose self-denial, sacrifice, or suffering for the sake of Christ, you get to fellowship with Christ on the cross-side of the atonement. You experience the downward plunge of your flesh being killed, your pride dying, your grip on earthly things loosening, your idols shrinking. And in those moments, the Spirit of God shines in your heart to give you the light of the glory of Christ. You come to know Jesus by experience, because you are choosing to follow His path. You don't just know about Him, you know Him intimately, because no one comes to know the person and the heart of Christ like the one on the Calvary Road with Jesus.

This is what Paul meant when He wrote, "24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church". It is not that Christ's afflictions are lacking. It is that believers have a role to play in entering into the self-denial, sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus.

But the cross is followed by the resurrection.

Paul says he will know Christ by the fellowship of His sufferings and the power of His resurrection. The power is the same power that was evident in the resurrection; God's life-giving power that operates in a believer.

¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and

revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*

The Christian life is a life where we know Christ through the enabling power of God. This is the upswing, the victory side of the Christian life. We fellowship with Christ in the emptying and humbling part of self-denial, sacrifice and suffering. But remember chapter 2:9 said, “Wherefore, God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name.” So, in the same way, the believer who fellowships with Christ in the humbling part, then experiences the exaltation part, the power of His resurrection.

Those who have died and die with Christ, rise and will rise with Christ. Sharing in suffering, and sharing in victory.

So what does this power side, this resurrection side look like?

It looks like enablement. It is God's power enabling you to live out the Christian life.

When you're in school and you do high school physics, you usually study circuits. And at the top of the circuit is usually the power source, the battery or the electricity source. And it is usually given with the term “potential difference”. Potential difference means the voltage or power that would be supplied when the circuit is complete, when you close all switches and complete the circuit.

The potential difference in the Christian life is this power, the very same power that raised Christ from the dead. When you complete the circuit by obeying God, doing what He commands, submitting to Him, this power flows, and enables you to obey. This is the power of the Holy Spirit filling us, and enabling us to do all the works of the Christian life.

Obey God fruitfully. Pray in the will of God. Praise God with full hearts. Give testimony of God to others with boldness. All the things you know a Christian should do is what the power of the resurrection enables you to do. Love God. Love others. Control your tongue, take your thoughts captive, speak the truth in love, encourage others, show mercy, resist the devil.

Once again, when you do this, when you experience this enablement, just like when you fellowshiped with Christ in His sufferings, so here you experience Christ on the resurrection-side of the atonement. You experience the upward surge of your spirit being like Christ, your new nature living and thriving, your affections being set on things above, your love for God growing. And in those moments, the Spirit of God shines in your heart to give you the light of the glory of Christ. You come to know Jesus by experience, because you experience Christ through this enablement.

You'll notice I haven't said that sanctification occurs mainly when you read the Bible and pray. It does occur there, and it is when you worship with other believers or alone, it is some of the most concentrated times of illumination occur. But actually, most of your life will not be times of private or public worship. Those are the times to be fueling your soul with the word of Christ, fueling your soul with the oil that the Holy Spirit will ignite and burn in your heart. But actually, this illumination is going to occur all through life, fellowshiping with Christ in self-denial, sacrifice and suffering, and experiencing Christ in the power of enablement and grace to live the Christian life. And in those times, the Bible and prayer come back to us as we live, recalling Scripture, praying in the moment, obeying the Word.

That's encouraging to know, because we don't always get to read the Bible and pray like we would like to. We try to be regular to church, and we should be, because these are the high points, the

mountain peaks of knowing Christ. And like Peter, we can be tempted to say, Lord, it is good to be here, let us build some tents to just stay here. But we can't stay on the mountain. We must go down into life, where there are dirty dishes, and naughty children, and traffic, and unhappy customers, and bills, and debts, and job uncertainty, and things that break in your house, and in your body, and family trials, and sinful habits, and broken relationships. To know that you can know Christ in all of these times, in all of these places, means you can know Him always. Paul says, I know Him in sanctification, because whether it is the downward curve of suffering, or the upward swing of the power of His resurrection, I know Jesus either way, through fellowship or through enabling power.

But how is this possible? Paul's last phrase gives us

III. The Position of Sanctification

being conformed to His death

This word *conformed* is a word found only here in the New Testament. It's a compound word. The first part is *sym*, where we get the English symphony, sympathetic, symbiosis. It means together. The second part is *morphe*, where we get the English words to morph, morphology, or even metamorphosis. Put those two together and it means to get the same shape, to be moulded into the pattern. Paul says, this knowing of Christ by dying and rising with Him is made possible because I am included in and united to the death of Jesus.

Paul only mentions death here, but in other places he makes it clear that we have been united not only to Jesus death, but also to His resurrection.

¹What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:1–11)

In fact, we are even in union with Christ's ascension, seatedness in Heaven and Second Coming.

Why is this important? Because this positional union is the real-life basis for Christians being able to fellowship with Jesus in His sufferings and partake in the power of the resurrection. Union with Christ does not only mean Jesus died and rose for you; it means you died and rose with Jesus. That with makes all the difference in the world to your sanctification now. You can experience Christ because this is actually your position.

You see, if you ask a rhino to flap his wings, it is not something he can do. If you ask an elephant to swim butterfly, it is not something he can do. Ask a pigeon to throw the shotput and he cannot. The very nature of those animals means they cannot perform that activity.

So, when we say, know Christ by dying and rising, know Christ by fellowshiping with suffering and experiencing the power of resurrection, there is only one creature in the world that can do that:

a saved, born again, justified believer in Christ. You can say to that creature, die and rise, because dying and rising is in the nature, you have been joined to death and resurrection.

So much so, that if you avoid self-denial and sacrifice and suffering, and avoid all those acts that require enabling power, you won't experience fellowship with Christ or the power of Christ. And this is why for many Christians, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They avoid all death, and all acts which require faith and power. So they deny their very nature, which is to know Jesus through the down of sacrifice, self-denial and suffering, and up of enablement and grace. The light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, shining in their hearts by the illumination of the Spirit burns low, because they take in little of His Word, and avoid that death and resurrection which the Spirit uses to show them Christ.

Once again, the Christian life is become what you are. Practice your position. Do what you already are.

This means, when God gives you the opportunity to either experience the fellowship of His sufferings in self-denial, sacrifice or suffering, or when He gives you the opportunity to employ the power of God to perform some positive act of the Christian life, don't shrink back. To shrink back is to avoid your Moses moment: seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, as the Spirit shines that knowledge in your heart.

For Paul, he was willing to lose all, give up all, and attempt all so as to experience Christ.

Let all our employment be to know God: the more one knows Him, the more one desires to know Him. And as knowledge is commonly the measure of love, the deeper and more extensive our knowledge shall be, the greater will be our love: and if our love of God were great, we should love Him equally in pains and pleasures.” - Samuel Rutherford, *Letters*