

The Cost of Knowing God

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"None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Hebrews 8:11). This is God's promise to us under the new covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. The door has been opened by God to all who will come and drink of the water of life. The promise is that all may know God. We may know Him closely, in a personal way, in intimate communion. Christ has paid the price, and there is no hindrance. Why then do not all men know God? If the price has been paid, what hinders us?

There must be an answer, since it is obvious that most men do not know God or even have a desire to know God. Is there a price yet to be paid? As we address this question, it is our prayer that we may consider carefully God's provision and our response to His provision, that we may all know God together.

The Meaning of Knowing God

What does it mean to know God? If our answer to this question is wrong, it will leave us thinking that we know God when in fact we do not. Most people think they know God because they know facts about God and believe the right things. God does want us to know and believe truths, but this does not constitute knowing God.

A man could study about a great man, read his biography, and admire his life, but until he meets the man personally, he can never say that he knows him. Knowing requires personal contact. The extent of knowing is dependent on the extent of the personal contact. Unless we have personal contact with God, we do not know God.

Knowing God is much more involved than knowing another person. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. To know God, we must enter into His presence by the Spirit. This is not a light thing, however, because God is holy and perfectly righteous, and He cannot allow any unclean thing in His presence.

If men in the old covenant dared to enter the presence of God on their own terms, they were struck dead. God has not changed. We still cannot come to God on our terms or in a way that seems good to us. We must come as God has designed, or we cannot know God. Although it may seem that God is not as severe today as He was in olden times, the price of disobeying God and bringing our own efforts is still the same--death. Spiritual death often comes long before physical death, and many men are walking tombs.

The only way that we can know God and the things of God is by the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:12). The Holy Spirit has been given that we may be brought into the presence of God in reality (Ephesians 2:18). The Holy Spirit takes of the things of God and makes them ours (John 16:15). He indwells us and reveals the things of God to our hearts. Everything now is by the Spirit. He gives us God's life (eternal life) that we may know Him (John 17:3).

This knowing is a place of communion and fellowship past anything we know in the natural. It is knowing and experiencing God in reality. It is wonderful in its experience, but it is also a place of responsibility. The joys are not without conditions. If we want to know God in reality, we must meet the conditions. What are these conditions?

Counting the Cost

At one point, there were great multitudes following Jesus (Luke 14:25-33). They saw something in Jesus that was attractive. All saw from their own perspective, but what they saw attracted them to Jesus. This is true of most men. We see something in somebody else that we like, but the question is whether we are willing to pay the price to make it ours. Everything has a price. God's love moved Him to pay the price to redeem the world back to Himself, and that price was His only Son. What was the price that Jesus put to those who were following Him? *"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple..."* (Luke 14:33).

What does it mean to forsake all? Our first response may be that we do not have anything to forsake. We think of the rich young ruler, and it is hard for us to relate to what Jesus told him because we do not think we have any riches. We may not have what this world calls riches, but riches are not just wealth and possessions. Riches are anything we have that is valuable to us. What is valuable to us? Knowledge? Friends? Our job? Our plans? Our opinions? Our convictions? Jesus said that we must forsake all that we have, even our own life. This is the price.

If we are not willing to forsake all that we have and all that we can do, we cannot be disciples of Jesus. And if we are not disciples of Jesus, we can never know God, because Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other way. The beginning place of knowing God is seeing in reality that I can do nothing, and that nothing I have is of value to God. God is complete in Himself, and He does not need any of my efforts or ability. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,"* and the "poor in spirit" are those who have a lack (Matthew 5:3). We must sense our lack before we are open to anything God has for us.

Jesus said to those who were following Him that they needed to count the cost. If they were going to count anything else as being of value, they ought not to start, because they would not be able to finish. The cost to us is not something we can do, but rather giving up trying to do what we cannot do. The final thing that we are apt to count most dear is our own life. Jesus said we must yield that also. Our life is to be presented as a living sacrifice to God. What is our life? Is it not our abilities, our goals, our plans, and what we possess in terms of natural resources? Can God bless our plans, our efforts, and our natural abilities? He cannot, or He would be working against us.

The root of sin is finding fulfillment separate from God. Was that not what caused Lucifer to fall? A life that is lived with fulfillment in anything other than God is a living death. If we want God, we must be willing to pay the price, which is all that we have, given up to Him. It is all or nothing--there is no middle ground.

If we do not settle this question in the beginning of our walk with Jesus, we will never know the rich blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. If we have come to God on the basis of love, this will be the easiest thing in the world. If we have come on any other basis, these demands will seem unreasonable, and we will argue and not pay the price. May the Lord open our eyes this day to see the riches of God, and may our hearts respond wholly to the wooing of the Holy Spirit.

Being For God, Not Doing For God

There are many in this world that are sincere when they say they want to serve God. They have counted the cost, and are willing to forsake all for Him. But the forsaking is what they define, not what God defines. This is a subtle error, but it is a very great error. Both Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to God, but God did not accept the sacrifice of Cain. Cain brought what he thought would be good, but it was not the sacrifice that God had commanded. This is still the error of many today.

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:19,29). We were purchased at a great price for God. That is very different from our doing something for God. We can do acts for God with a sincere heart, while never yielding ourselves up to God as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Many will say on the judgment day that they have done great works for God in Jesus' name, and the answer will be, *"I never knew you, depart from Me..." (Matthew 6:21-23).* Deeds done in the name of the Lord with good intentions, apart from knowing God by the Spirit, have no meaning to God. God wants us to know Him. That is the only place we can begin, and that is the place we must remain.

Often, when we begin to get serious with God, we look around and see great needs in this world. Then we look at our own resources. We connect these two, and then decide how we can serve God. I may try to be an athlete for God, or a pilot in missionary work or a secretary for my church. Because I have these abilities and because there is a need, I conclude that I can serve God. But, brother or sister in Christ, may I lovingly but strongly say that we do not serve God in this way. This was the error of Cain. Our intentions may be good, but we are woefully ignorant of God and His ways.

God is not interested in what we can do for Him. Rather, He is interested in us. He is interested in dwelling in our hearts by His Holy Spirit, and in sanctifying us (setting us apart) for Himself. This is an entirely different matter. He wants to make us a witness unto Him, one who is giving forth a living testimony of who He is. Our lives should bear witness of His life. For this to happen, we must allow God to touch our whole hearts, that is, our whole inner man.

The cost of knowing God is not great heroic deeds and great discipline, human effort and sacrifice. The cost is giving up the right to ourselves, our lives and what we want to do, and yielding in submission to God as a vessel for living His life. This is where most men fail. As long as they can dictate what they will do for God, they are willing, but to yield up their lives and let God live through them is another matter. But right here is where we must transact business with God, if we want to know Him.

Someone may feel that what is being said ignores a need for evangelism, and that we are unconcerned for lost souls. God is far more concerned about lost souls than we are, but until God can get our hearts and we can find a place of rest in knowing Him, we are of no value in God's hands to lost souls. We cannot save men. Only God can do that. Our efforts only hinder. Only as we are set aside for God, knowing Him in fellowship and communion, can we even see what God is doing or how He is doing it.

God is working by His Spirit, not by means of human effort or natural abilities. The weapons of our warfare are all spiritual. For us to be of use to God, we must be channels of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). If we are truly knowing God, God will send us out as He sees fit, but unless we are in that abiding place, God cannot send us. We must be knowing Him.

Faith, the Way of Knowing

How do we begin? If we cannot do anything and God must do all, what then is there for us to do? Some others asked this question, and here is the answer of Jesus: *"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent"* (John 6:29). This is not a small thing. Many have said they believed in Jesus, but the works did not follow. James tells us that faith without works is dead (James 2:20). What works follow real faith? Jesus promised that rivers of living water would flow from the hearts of those who believe (John 7:39). These rivers of living water flow from God; thus they bring God and all that He is into our lives. He purifies and sets us apart unto Himself. To be of value to God: we must partake of His nature. Faith is the only way this can take place. We must do business with God.

What is faith? Faith is *"the substance of things not seen, the evidence of things hoped for"* (Hebrews 11:1). God is the author of faith in our hearts. He authors that faith by speaking His word to us, but faith is incomplete until from a believing heart we take action on what God has spoken. God always speaks for a purpose, and He touches the area where we need to respond to Him at that time.

When He speaks, we know Him afresh. He reveals more of Himself in the word that He speaks to us. If our hearts are right before God, His word will find a resting place in our hearts. If we recognize what God has spoken, obedience should be our only response. Only when we obey does the word take root in our lives and result in "works" that bring glory to God. So, our place is obedience to God. God initiates--we respond.

Said in another way, the cost of knowing God is obedience. Unless we are willing to obey God, we will never know God. We know (or "experience") God as we respond to His word in every situation of life. That is why the Lord tells us to be thankful, and even joyful, in every trial, knowing that our faith is being tested (to reveal what quality it is) and that the true patience of God is being produced in us. The character of God is being produced in us in reality, not just in theory. Knowing God is not a matter of the mind, but of every aspect of our lives. Unless we are active in this obedience, we will never see our lives changed so that we can be a glory to Him and have the fragrance of a heavenly life.

Knowing God Is Salvation

Another mistake that is often made is to define salvation separately from knowing God. The question today most often is, "Are you saved?" Knowing God is often thought of as a higher place for those few who desire it, but comfort is taken from the doctrine that at least a person is "saved." Such a concept is not to be found in scripture.

We are saved from a place of sin and separation from God so that we can know and have fellowship with God. We are either in fellowship with God or we are not. There is no middle ground. We are able to repent from sin and turn to God because of what Christ did on the cross. If He had not paid the price of our salvation, there would be no place of repentance. Our only hope would be death and permanent separation from God because of sin.

When we repent and know cleansing in our hearts by the blood of Jesus Christ, we are ready for God to come and indwell us by His Spirit. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask, and the rivers of living water begin to flow in our lives (John 7:37-39). We are now in a condition where we can begin to know God. *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"* (John 17:3).

When we partake of eternal life (God's life), we receive the ability to have fellowship with God and know Him by the Spirit. Many, if not most, have stopped short of this place of knowing, thinking that

they know God, but in reality only having heard about God. If we have not partaken of His life, we cannot know God or the things of God (I Corinthians 2:12). This knowing of God is salvation, and it is the only way we can be delivered from sin, ourselves, and this world. He Himself is our salvation. Knowing God is not optional. It is the only place God has provided, and it is open to all who are willing to pay the price. Do we want to know God?

Love is the Only Answer

When we consider the price and find ourselves struggling with the high cost, one thing is certain; we are not yet responding to God's love out of love. The price is only high when we are not moving out of the motivation of love. Jesus said that His yoke was easy and His burden was light (Matthew 11:30). A love grown cold makes the cost seem high and the burden heavy. The only obedience that has any meaning to God is that which is born out of love. *"If you love Me, keep My commandments,"* Jesus said (John 14:15).

What is love? Where does it come from? How can I have His love? If these are our questions, then let us take them to God and let Him answer them. The answers to these questions will lead us into the path of knowing God. *"God is love"* (I John 4:16). If God is love, the only way that we can get love into our lives is to get God into our lives. The Holy Spirit (who is God) puts His love into our hearts (Romans 5:5).

If we try to express the love of God, we will fail. If we abide in His love, His love will be expressed in and through our lives without self-effort. To try to express love or try to obey is bondage. To abide in Christ is freedom. He sets us free from ourselves, our desires, our ambitions and our limitations, and brings us into a broad place of living--living in His love. When we have paid the price, which is giving up our life, then there is no more "price." We have been set free into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

What is a marriage without love? A prison cell! What is "salvation" without love? The same--and more than that, deception, because apart from God's love in our hearts, there is no salvation. Salvation is salvation from ourselves, and the only way we can be saved from ourselves is to know God's love filling our hearts. Was there ever anything too hard to do for the one you loved? If this is true of earthly loves, how much more with our heavenly Father, who is the very definition of love?

A test of whether we love God may be seen in the expression of His love to others. *"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"* (I John 4:20). It is impossible to give an expression of love towards our brother if God's love is not filling our hearts. I Corinthians 13:4-7 is impossible, apart from ability from God. We must be honest with ourselves in this matter, for if we try to pretend, we fool only ourselves, and in the end we are the losers.

Love is an expression of oneness, and that oneness with our brother is defined by God Himself: *"...that they may be one as We are"* (John 17:11). God is one, and He has made the way that we may know that same oneness. *"I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me"* (John 17:23). The desire of our hearts is that we give forth a pure testimony of God to the world, and the way we do this is by love.

In light of eternity and the riches of His love, how can we then afford not to pay the price? What we have is nothing, and what He has is everything. Shall we not give up our nothing to gain His everything? Has not God loved first? Did He not prove His love at the cross? Let us respond this day to

His love, and enter into the reality of a relationship with God. Surely the true price has been paid, and the way made known. The price we pay actually is not even a price at all. It is a real step, however, for God does not force Himself upon us. The door is open. May our hearts respond this day to His love, and enter into the true riches of God Himself.