



A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

QUEST LESSON D-10

The Problem: If we are to remain happy, committed Christians, our knowledge of God must be constantly growing. To stagnate in our spiritual growth is to fall back into the way of life we once knew. Knowledge of God is not like knowledge of science, mathematics, or history. It is not just an intellectual grasp resulting from having read a book. Of course, as we shall discover, the Bible is a most fruitful source of divine knowledge, but such learning is far from being purely academic. God does not say that the person with the greatest head knowledge of the Bible is the most holy and most qualified for heaven. To know God is to experience an ever abiding and ever-increasing spiritual presence in life. It is a matter of a heart relationship with the Lord of the universe. It means having His Holy Spirit's pervading presence as the governing power in the mind and the body. It involves the character of Christ becoming our character so that in carrying out our own impulses, we are doing His will. Knowledge of God is a spiritual experience in which there must be constant growth for it to be maintained.

The delightfully paradoxical element in this growth process is that at any stage, because of our union with Christ, we have the gift of eternal life. The thief on the cross had only just begun his Christian walk the day he died. But he will be in the Kingdom on the resurrection morning. Had he gone on living, he would have had to grow in understanding and experience until divine strength and purity had become the uninterrupted characteristics of his existence.

But how does God give us this experience? How does He communicate with us? What must we do to ensure that we are always receptive to His communications? To hold the door of the heart open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit is crucial to growth in spiritual life. But when we do this, how does Christ speak to us and strengthen us spiritually? What are the instruments He uses to convey to us the knowledge and grace we need for the challenges of everyday life?

The Scriptures answer these questions with simplicity and clarity.

Objectives

First, we shall note how God communicates with us through nature.

Second, it is fascinating to consider how the Lord speaks to us through His providential leadings in our lives.

Third, God teaches us through the influence and instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, God speaks through His Word.

Fifth, we must understand that to know Christ is to know God. As we discover a closer walk with Jesus by means of the above channels of communication, we are entering into the knowledge of God that is the source of eternal life.

I. God Communicates Through Nature

The pantheistic idea that God is in everything that lives and that we discover Him because of His presence in all created things is quite unbiblical. The truth is that, as we enjoy, study, and interact with the created world, we are increasingly impressed by the Holy Spirit with the love and care of our Creator for us and for the rest of His creation. The beautiful sunset draws us nearer to the God who created such startling loveliness because we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit who interprets the scene that way. Those who do not believe in God do not recognize the sunset as His handiwork and fail to enter into the deep spiritual experience it has to teach.

The Word

1. How does nature testify to God's love? Psalm 19:1; 33:5-9.
2. How did Jesus refer to nature in illustrating God's care for His children? Matthew 6:26-30.
3. How does soil illustrate the state of the human heart? Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23.

Explanation: The sky, the sea, the lofty trees, the places lake, and the majestic mountains all speak to us of God's love who created such magnificence. Jesus often used scenes from nature to illustrate the work of God's Spirit on the heart, and His very personal care for each of His trusting children. Despite the instance of death, disease, calamity, and famine in our world, God provides for the plants and animals. If it were not for sin, there would be no death; if it were not for God's care, there would be little else but death. Satan's kingdom specializes in tragedy and heartache. God loves His created world and wants to preserve it in a state of beauty and purity. Just so, He cares for each of us. The hairs of our head are all numbered, we are told (Matthew 10:30).

Jesus taught the people of His day through the avenue of their most familiar associations. They were used to farming as a means of producing the food they needed. So Jesus used rural scenes to illustrate how God fosters His love and truth in our hearts. The parable of the sower is a classic example. The wayside soil, the stony ground, the soil in which thorns and weeds were growing, and the good soil represent four kinds of people who hear the Gospel. The wayside soil symbolizes the heart of the person who really does not listen carefully and so does not understand. The devil soon takes away even his superficial knowledge. The stony ground hearer is the person who initially rejoices in the Gospel message. But he does not grow spiritually as he should. When things get tough, and he has to face some difficulties because of his new faith, he becomes discouraged easily and gives up. The thorny ground illustrates the person who accepts the Gospel but later turns away because worldly cares, wealth, or pleasure take him away from Christ. The good soil represents the Christian who grows into a healthy character for God because he is constantly receiving nourishment from above and having his relationship with Christ renewed.

This parable is just one of many in which Jesus used the things of nature to illustrate the spiritual realm. He intended the Christian to relate the events of the natural world to those of the spiritual world. We learn how God works by studying nature. We also learn how Satan works; because he has perverted that which the Lord intended to be always perfect.

Relevance: Do you think of Jesus when you see a colorful lily? Do you see God when you admire a mighty redwood tree? Are you reminded of His power when you stand by the surging ocean, or of His peace when you sit by an untroubled lake? As you work in your garden, are you reminded of Jesus' instruction that the state of the soil represents the state of our hearts and that His care for the birds flying over your head is an assurance that He will constantly care for you? You see, interpreted by the Holy Spirit, nature speaks to you of divine things.

II. God Speaks Through His Providences

By "providence," we mean God's care and guidance of His believing children. The way in which He arranges the affairs of your life, overruling the evil that Satan and selfish people would do to you, and providing rich, meaningful experiences to foster your relationship with Him and to increase your usefulness in His service, are some of the means by which He teaches you more about Himself.

The Word

4. What comforting assurances are we given that the Lord will protect us and control all the affairs of our lives? Psalm 121:1-8.
5. How did the Lord overrule to bring good out of evil for Joseph? Genesis 45:4-5.
6. How did providential intervention preserve the Apostles? Acts 5:17-25; 12:5-11.

Explanation: Psalm 121 promises that the Lord will be untiringly vigilant in His watch care over the one who trusts Him. He will not allow him to be overcome by evil and will guide his daily activities. By His providences, He will preserve him as His child and shelter him from storms within and without.

Such was the Lord's work for Joseph. For years of his life, everything seemed to go wrong for Joseph. He was sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers, falsely accused of immorality by a lascivious woman, and thrown into prison as a common criminal. It seemed that the whole world had forgotten him. But God was watching over him with tireless care. After years of suffering, Joseph came forth molded after the similitude of the divine character, ready for the prime ministership of Egypt, qualified to rule according to God's will. What Satan and Joseph's wicked brothers had intended to destroy him had become, in the hands of God, the means of making him the great man that he was.

Similarly, the Lord provided for the apostles and overruled the schemes of the violent opposers of His truth and people in every age. Death and suffering were invented by the devil but overruled by God to encourage and save. Divine providence is the most powerful controlling force in our world today.

Relevance: The Lord will direct the affairs of your life if you constantly submit to His will and trust Him to provide what is best for you and for those you influence. God's providences can only work for you if you do not try to manage without God. When we attempt to unravel the tangled strands of our lives without Christ's direction, we are sure to make matters worse. We are in constant need of His merciful providence.

III. God Speaks Through The Influence Of The Holy Spirit

The voice of the Holy Spirit is not audible, but it is loud and clear nonetheless. As we pray, study, and listen, the Spirit reveals the message of God to our hearts, tells us our duty, and bestows upon us the characteristics of Jesus.

The Word

7. What enlightenment does the Holy Spirit provide for the humble student of God's will? John 14:26; 16:13-15; 1 John 2:27.
8. How does the Holy Spirit direct the work of believers? Acts 10:19-20; 16:6.
9. What special qualities does the Holy Spirit bring to us? Acts 1:8; Romans 8:9-10.

Explanation: As the divine Teacher, the Holy Spirit has the three fundamental characteristics of personality: intellect, will, and emotion. His omniscient intellect is employed in teaching the truth to His believing people (John 16:13; 14:26). He exercises His will in deciding what spiritual gifts to give to believers (1 Corinthians 12:11), and in directing them in the work of the Lord (Acts 16:6-7). He can be pleased (Acts 15:28), grieved (Ephesians 4:30), and vexed (Isaiah 63:10).

The Holy Spirit is one of the three members of the Godhead. He is equal in power and authority with the Father and the Son (See Acts 5:3-4). The presence of the Spirit in your heart is the presence of the Deity. And His presence brings power and righteousness, because He is all-powerful and perfectly righteous. The character of Christ is bestowed upon us when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Relevance: It is not possible to know God without the presence of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Divine knowledge is having Christ, the Father, and the Spirit living within your life. This is what Paul referred to as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

IV. God Speaks Through His Word

Knowing God is not an entirely subjective experience. The Scriptures present the same knowledge of God for all to enjoy. In fact, to claim knowledge of God, which is not described in the Bible, is an attempt to go beyond revealed truth. Isaiah wrote, "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

The Word

10. What does studying of the Word do for us? 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Romans 15:4.
11. How much of the Bible testifies of Christ? John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44.

12. How do we partake of Christ's spiritual life? John 6:53, 63.

Explanation: The whole Bible is Christ-centered. Jesus said so! When we find Christ in the Old Testament, we find the entire purpose for which it was written. And the whole New Testament testifies to Him. Bible study leads us to Him. If we pray for divine guidance as we study, the Holy Spirit will impart to us Christ's own interpretation of His Word. Then we will be reproved for our sins, strengthened spiritually, informed doctrinally, enlightened in regard to prophecy, and drawn into closer union with Christ. The Word is Christ's flesh and blood, of which we daily partake as we study and pray.

Relevance: Knowledge of the Word imparted by the Holy Spirit as you study is knowledge of God. What a blessing that will be to you! The Psalmist wrote: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

V. To Know Christ Is To Know God

Jesus Christ came to our world to reveal the loving character of God. When we know Him as Friend and Savior, we know God. As we talk to Jesus, we talk to God. As we listen to His voice by the Holy Spirit, we listen to God.

The Word

13. Who did Jesus say we know when we know Him? John 14:6-11.

14. What is the secret of eternal life? John 17:3.

15. Whose character is bestowed upon the Christian believer? Revelation 7:1-3; 3:12; 14:1.

Explanation: The mercy and forgiveness of Jesus truly represents the love of God. It is a terrible perversion of the truth to represent the God of the Old Testament as a harsh Judge, who lacked the love of Jesus Christ. The God of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ. He accompanied Israel in their wanderings (1 Corinthians 10:4). He was the Deity manifested in the Most Holy Apartment of the sanctuary, above the mercy seat. And He spoke the law from Sinai. There is no dichotomy of character between the Father and the Son. To know One is to know the Other.

John the Revelator predicted that before the close of human probation, a short while prior to the second coming of Jesus, those who genuinely trust in the word will be sealed (Revelation 7:1-3). This seal is spoken of as God's name in the forehead (Revelation 3:12; 14:1). His name is a symbol of His character. The forehead is a symbol of the mind. Hence, His name in the forehead is a symbolical representation of the fact that the faithful at the end of time have received the character of Christ and the Father bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit. To be one of God's sealed saints who will live until Jesus comes, we must enter into the fullest possible relationship with Christ. By accepting the message of nature, by submitting to His divine providences, listening to the voice of His Spirit, and partaking regularly of His Word, we grow more like Him and more free from sin. Then He will seal us before He comes, as a sign to the universe that we are His for eternity, and that Satan cannot take us out of His hand. Knowing Christ has saved us!

Relevance: Knowledge of God is given by God to your heart as you seek Him every day. There is no human knowledge that can compare with this experience. Satan and his demons are constantly trying to entice us into the realms of evil. They want us to be so acquainted with sin that Christ will have no place in our hearts. By the grace of Jesus Christ, we must study, pray, and listen so that His will is always our guiding star.

Are you willing to learn of Him until He comes to take you to the heavenly Kingdom?

Review Questions

1. True or False

- a. Nature teaches us because God is living in all living things.
- b. We know God when we know ourselves; we are all little gods.
- c. To know Christ is to know God.
- d. The Holy Spirit bestows the righteousness of God upon us.

2. Discuss: Since knowledge of God is more a spiritual experience than intellectual grasp, very simple, uneducated people can be saved. Salvation is not just for scholars, but for the whole world of people who respond to the love of Christ. Memory, intelligence, learning are all good; but the Lord will save those who have such gifts in small supply. Do you agree? Can you give some illustrations of this fact?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, Chapter 10.