

Knowing God and Ourselves – Praying Rightly

November 28, 2021

Sermon Text: Ephesians 1,
Philippians 1, Colossians 1

Scripture Reading: John 17

I mentioned last time that while we all know that we should pray – for ourselves and for others – it is a very important question for us to ask as to just what we should pray for. This is a problem which cannot be answered fully –

Rom 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (27) And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

However, there are some basic topics for our prayers given to us in the Bible. For instance-

Mat 6:9-13 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (10) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us this day our daily bread,

(12) and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

We have several places in the Bible where the Apostle Paul includes in his letters the content of his prayers for believers in the various churches. Specifically we find them in the first chapters of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. There may be others as well but let’s just focus this morning on these three.

If the Apostle Paul were going to pray for us, what would he pray? And how would the content of his prayers for us differ from the things we often pray for or fail to pray for? Let’s take a look.

Eph 1:15-20 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, (16) I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, (17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, (18) having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, (19) and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great

might (20) that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

Php 1:9-11 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, (10) so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, (11) filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Col 1:9-12 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, (10) so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (11) being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; (12) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Now the thing that leaps out at us as we read these 3 prayers is that they are remarkably parallel in content. Let's see if we can chart them side by side to demonstrate this (see last attached page.

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Now, you can see that the parallels are not exact, point for point, but nevertheless the content of these prayers is very similar. And that should tell us that these topics of prayer are ones which we should imitate. It wasn't that Paul was not concerned for basic needs – the Lord's prayer even includes "give us this day our daily bread" – but here are the matters which were particularly vital to Paul, and therefore should be to us as well. In fact, as we read John 17 earlier, you will find most of these prayer points in Jesus' prayer there as well. In fact, I conclude that Jesus stated the fundamental essence of these prayers of Paul:

Joh 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Some of you may remember J.I. Packer's book, Knowing God, which is about this very subject. And it really is at the heart of Paul's prayers here. Knowing God. This is the aspect of the prayers I want us to focus on now.

After opening with giving thanks to God for these believers, Paul gets right to it:

...that God may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him

...that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and discernment

...Filled with the knowledge of his will...increasing in the knowledge of God

And really for the most part the rest of these 3 prayers are about this one request – that their knowledge of God would increase, that it might abound...so that they might know all he has done for us in Christ, and so that they might do a life pleasing to Him.

Knowing God. This is the most important thing we can pray for. Because to know God is eternal life. Let's see if we can pin down more clearly just what knowing God means.

Knowing God, first of all, does not mean merely knowing about God. All human beings know God in one sense:

Rom 1:21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Man the sinner knows God. That is, he knows that God exists, that God is God that God is the Creator of all things. He knows that he owes God thanks and worship. But this is not the knowledge of God which Paul is speaking of – it is not the knowledge of God which is eternal life.

G.K. Beale in his book on idolatry proposes this theme which is emphasized over and over again in the Bible. You have heard me quote it often before:

We become like what we revere, whether it be for ruin or for restoration.

And it is just what the Psalmist wrote:

Psa 115:4-8 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. (5) They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. (6) They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. (7) They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. (8) Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

And therefore if we do not know God, then we will not be growing in the knowledge of Him, we will not be growing in His wisdom and we will not

be increasing in a holy life. Listen to Packer on this:

The conviction behind the book is that ignorance of God—ignorance both of his ways and of the practice of communion with him—lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today. Two unhappy trends seem to have produced this state of affairs. Trend one is that Christian minds have been conformed to the modern spirit: the spirit, that is, that spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts of God. The modern way with God is to set him at a distance, if not to deny him altogether; and the irony is that modern Christians, preoccupied with maintaining religious practices in an irreligious world, have themselves allowed God to become remote. Clear-sighted persons, seeing this, are tempted to withdraw from the churches in something like disgust to pursue a quest for God on their own. Nor can one wholly blame them, for churchmen who look at God, so to speak, through the wrong end of the telescope, so reducing him to pigmy proportions, cannot hope to end up as more than pigmy Christians, and clear-sighted people naturally want something better than this. Furthermore, thoughts of death, eternity, judgment, the greatness of the soul and the abiding consequences of

temporal decisions are all “out” for moderns, and it is a melancholy fact that the Christian church, instead of raising its voice to remind the world of what is being forgotten, has formed a habit of playing down these themes in just the same way. But these capitulations to the modern spirit are really suicidal so far as Christian life is concerned.

Packer, J. I.. *Knowing God* (The IVP Signature Collection) (pp. 12-13). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

We begin to see it then? This is why Paul’s prayers focused on this business of *knowing God*. If we fail at this point, we will perish. Because if we do not know God, then He does not know us –

Mat 7:22-23 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ (23) And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Look again carefully at Paul’s prayers. Do you see how almost everything he prays for is an aspect of *knowing God*?

- Wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him

- Eyes of heart enlightened
- That you might know the hope
- That you might know the riches
- That you might know the greatness of His power
- That our love may abound with knowledge and discernment
- That you may approve what is excellent
- That you would be filled with the knowledge of his will
- That you would increase in the knowledge of God
- That you grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding
- That you might walk in a worthy manner

Knowing God is salvation. Knowing God is to be in Christ. It is to be known by Him as His own.

Let's check out some other scriptures that throw light on this question - just what does it mean to know God? It is a mystery because as you can see here in Jesus' high priestly prayer, knowing God entails being joined to Him in Christ. He in us and we in Him:

Joh 17:20-26 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, (21) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, **that they also may be in us**, so that the world may

believe that you have sent me. (22) The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, (23) **I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one**, so that the world may know that you sent me **and loved them even as you loved me**. (24) Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, **may be with me where I am, to see my glory** that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (25) O righteous Father, **even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me**. (26) I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, **that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.**"

This knowledge of God the world does not have. It is something given only to those whom He loves – to His elect – and it is only to be discovered in Christ. It is vitally connected with loving God and being loved by Him. To know God is to love God. To be known by God is to be loved by Him. To know God is to be in relationship to Him as Christ the Son is in relation to the Father.

And this knowledge of God *increases as we grow in Christ*. We come to know Him better and better until one day we will know Him fully – though I suppose

that we will never comprehend Him entirely.

Let's look at a number of scriptures now and let God's Word pin this down this definition of knowing God for us more precisely. This is always the safest way – to let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Psa 9:10 And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

To know someone's name is part of knowing the person. "Do you know the Creator?" "Yes. He is Yahweh." Or "He is Jesus Christ." And more, we see that to know God is *to put one's trust in Him*. Because those who know Him know that He does not forsake His people. Those who know God do not call Him Allah, or Baal, or even merely "the Creator." We know Him and therefore we know His name, and we know that we can trust Him. Failing at either of these points means that a person does not know Him.

Jer 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, (24) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and

knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

To know the Lord is to have an understanding who He is. It is to know and believe and trust in certain truths about Him that Jeremiah identifies here. And to know the Lord is to know what He delights in, what His will is, and what He hates. People who claim to know Him and yet who walk in sin and excuse evil, insisting that He will excuse it as well, *do not know the Lord*.

Jer 31:33-34 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (34) And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

To know the Lord is to be born again. Here, Jeremiah likens this new birth to having God's Law written on our heart. As a result, we know the Lord. To know God is to know His Word, and to love His Word and to obey it. When we

know the Lord, we do not need to be constantly commanded and forced and threatened to get us to obey what He delights on. No. Those who know the Lord know and do His Word. Joyfully.

Hos 6:1-3 “Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. (2) After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. (3) Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”

Here is a wonderful passage from Hosea. Verse 2 is a promise of Christ’s resurrection and our salvation in Him. Notice that this text shows us that to know the Lord is to have repented. People who know the Lord are people whom He has chastised and who believe that all who turn from sin and believe in Him will be healed by Him. People who refuse to repent, who insist on clinging to their sin, do not know the Lord.

1Co 15:34 Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Here we have the knowledge of God once again connected with repentance and holiness. Turning from sin. Those who know the Lord know that He is holy and that therefore we must be holy if we are to see Him. Those who know the Lord turn from sin.

2Co 4:3-6 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, **to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God. (5) For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (6) For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” **has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

This passage is huge and intricate. The knowledge of God is *light*. Just as God spoke and there was light in the darkness, so the knowledge of God is light which He gives to us – which He creates in us.

Those who do not know God are blind. Blinded by the devil. They cannot see God because they cannot and will not see that Christ is God.

People who do not know God are perishing. They are still in the realm of darkness and death. When we are born again, the lights go on and by faith we know that Christ is God. That seeing Christ and hearing Christ is to see and hear God. Knowing God means having eyes to see and ears to hear the Good Shepherd and to refuse to follow a false one.

2Th 1:7-8 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (8) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

To know God is to have eternal life. It is to love Him and it is to be loved by Him. But those who do not know the Lord refuse to obey Him and when He comes again all such people will be recipients of His holy justice and perish. Knowing God is to have Him as our great Defender.

1Jn 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

There are no doubt many, many other scriptures that enable us to grasp what knowing God means. But we will conclude with this one. Knowing God is to have understanding and faith that God is true, that His Word therefore is true and trustworthy. That we are unfailingly joined to Christ who is the Way, the truth and the Life. And that this understanding has been given to us by Christ in the new birth.

People who have not been born again do not know God. They do not love Him. They do not believe in or trust Him. He does not know or love them.

It is therefore no wonder that the central subject of the Apostle's prayers for these believers is that they would know God more and more and, as a result, increase in holiness themselves.

This subject must necessarily then be the chief subject of our prayers – for ourselves and for one another. I do not think it to be an exaggeration to say that the real source of all of our worries and troubles and anxieties is *a deficiency in our knowledge of God*. Am I anxious about tomorrow? It is because I do not know the Lord as fully as I need to. Am I overwhelmed with grief and sorrow? The remedy is for the Lord to show us more and more of Himself. All of our fears and sorrows and worries vaporize in the face of the glory of God.

Php 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (5) Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; (6) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:15-20**Philippians 1:9-11****Colossians 1:9-12**

I do not cease to give thanks for you	I thank my God in remembrance of you	We always thank God when we pray for you (vs 3)
That God may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him	Your love may abound more with knowledge and discernment...	Filled with the knowledge of his will...increasing in the knowledge of God
Eyes of your heart enlightened	...so that you may approve what is excellent	...spiritual wisdom and understanding
That you might know the hope to which he called you		
That you might know the riches of his glorious inheritance		That you might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him
That you might know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us (resurrection and ascension power)		Strengthened with all power...for all endurance and patience with joy