

Knowing the One True God and His Son (John 17:3-5)

A recent News in Focus headline early this year read ‘a professor at Wheaton college, one of most prestigious evangelical institutions in America, had been the subject of controversy because she ... said in a Facebook posting that Muslims and Christians worship the same God ...

[Al Mohler wrote in the article] Christians thinking from a biblical worldview have to understand [behind the headline] is an issue of enormous consequential and inescapable importance here, and that is the very question raised by the ... claim that Muslims and Christians worship the same God ... an increasingly secular [media] that doesn’t believe in a god of any form is in no position to judge the relative importance of theological issues, much less to answer the question—even from what we might expect would be an informed understanding of history. That’s simply too much to expect from most secular reporters today. But the question as to whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God essentially comes down to this—this is the single question of utmost and indeed of eternal significance—is it possible to know the one true and living God if one denies Jesus Christ as his Son?

... that is, biblically speaking, impossible. It is impossible to argue biblically from the New Testament that it is possible to know the one true and living God and deny that Jesus Christ is his Son. The Quranic teachings of Islam officially deny that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God...’¹

[it’s a question Christians need to be able to answer biblically]

When Jesus revealed Himself to the Samaritan woman, the question came up as to whether they worshipped the true God in the right way and He said in John 4:22: ‘***You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know ... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth ... God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.***’

[Jesus said without God as Spirit, without His truth, it’s not true worship]

If we look at Jn 17:1, do Muslims pray to the same God who is Father, Son, and Spirit? Jn 17:1 prays *Father, glorify your Son...* Muslims don’t believe God *is* a Father, and the Qur’an warns it’s unacceptable to think of God *as* Father (112:3), it warns in strong terms not to say God has a son (19:88-92). So no, Muslims do not pray to the same God. John 17:3 talks about *knowing personally relationally* the one true God. It’s not enough to know *there is* one true God, like Muslims, Jews or Unitarians (or know *truth about* God). Al Mohler continues in his news briefing: ‘everyone knows something true about God, that is very clear in Romans chapter 1. When Paul was speaking to the Athenians in Acts chapter 17, he makes very clear that they know something about the one true and living God, but they do not know him as he must be known.’ Then Mohler quotes from Jn 8 and I want to turn there.

He argues we can't just point to the God of Abraham, which Jews, Muslims and Christians all point to as the father of their faith. In the context of Jn 8, Jews pointed to the God of Abraham they claimed to know and worship but in the end of Jn 8:19 Jesus tells these Jews: ... *You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also* [know=truly know]

[this is an important passage for you to know on how to know God]

Then in v. 53 they again claim to know God by a connection to Abraham.

⁵⁴ *Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'* ⁵⁵ ***But you have not known him ...*** [then v. 58] *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."* ⁵⁹ *So they picked up stones to throw at him ...*

Why did they pick up stones? They understood Jesus was claiming to be the God of Abraham, the One who reveals Himself to Abraham as 'I Am' (Gen 15), and to Moses in a burning bush with the name 'I Am that I Am' (Ex 3). The Jews believed it to be blasphemy for Jesus to claim the name of God so they picked up stones to stone him. Muslims also believe it to be blasphemy for God to have a partner or another person to be worshipped. Unforgivable sin in their theology is believing Jesus is God/the I Am, you die in your sins. But here in v. 24 Jesus says if you don't believe God the Son, you die in sin

²⁴ *I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he* [there's no 'he' in the original text, just 'I am'] *you will die in your sins.* The NIV has '*if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be...*' NAB has literally '*if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins*' (the Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translates it the same way in his translation). If you don't believe Jesus is who He claimed, the I AM, you die in sin. Jn 5:23 says *all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him* (NKJV). So you don't truly honor God if you don't honor His Son in the same way. You're not worshipping the same God if dishonor or don't worship Jesus.

[are there many ways to God, different names that save? No – Acts 4:12]

Now go to chapter 14 for the classic statement on the only way to worship the one true God, the only way to the Father: ⁶ *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* ⁷ *If you had known me, you would have known my Father also ...* ¹⁰ *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?...* ¹¹ *Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me...* [that takes us to Jn 17, the main text to see on the true God to worship] 17:3 *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

⁴ *I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.* ⁵ *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed* [hear the word of God the Son]

1. The Identity of the True God

Jesus says these words in v. 3 so people will know the only true God. The context of Jn 17 is God the Son praying to God the Father starting in v. 1. In v. 2 He talks about the sovereignty of God, His authority the Father gives to His Son over all flesh, all humanity, and how He gives eternal life to all the Father gives the Son. Now v. 3 balances God's sovereignty in salvation with man's responsibility: this gift of eternal life has to do with man knowing the true God. God is sovereign, we're responsible to know God in a saving way.

[I pray this message will help us know how to share how to know God]

The world outside Christ knows *of* God mentally, rationally, superficially, but the unsaved try to suppress God's truth in creation and conscience (Rom 1-2). That's not the type of personal knowing v. 3 is talking about. It's clear if you keep reading v. 25, it says *O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.*

The 'these' are believers, v. 20 is believers in Him. True believers know the Lord in a relational way. v. 25 says the world doesn't know the Father in a relational way, but Jesus says *'I know you, and these know'* [these believers know, in the sense of how Jesus knows His Father, knowing of relationship]

This word for *know* in v. 3 in the original text isn't intellectual knowledge, or mere awareness, or even religious devotion. Look at what Jesus said back in 16:2 *'They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.'* ³ *And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.'* So these aren't atheists, these are people who believe in God and believe their actions are actually service or worship to God, but Jesus says these people don't truly know the Father. He's talking about Jewish leaders who knew the Bible that existed at the time, and thought they worshipped the God of the Bible rightly and religiously, but they didn't know God truly relationally.

Jesus earlier said many would say *'Lord, Lord'* but the Lord will say to them on judgment day *'I never knew you'* (Mt 7). The Lord knows *about* everyone but this is deeper, a 2-way relational, intimate knowing. He never knew in a relationship sense many who claim to know Him. They didn't lose salvation, they never knew a personal love relation, as God says He *never* knew them.

To know God savingly is to be known by God relationally, love relationship 2-ways. Gal 4:9: *you have come to know God or rather to be known by God.* 1 Cor 8:3-5 *'if anyone loves God, he is known by God ... we know that "an idol has no real existence," and... "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth...for us there is one God.'*

True believers know, as Jn 17:3 says, there is only one true God, all others are false gods. What about Jesus in the 2nd half of the verse? 1 Jn 5:20 says of those who know God: *we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.* John, who heard Jesus say the words of Jn 17:3, he uses the same words to say Jesus is the true God and eternal life.

That takes it from #1. The Identity of God, to #2. The Deity of Christ

Jn 17:3 continues: *that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ...*

I had a Jehovah's Witness apologist call the church one time to ask me why we believe Jesus Christ is God, as this verse calls the Father '*the only true God*' and the next phrase adds '*and Jesus Christ.*' As I figured out he was a JW, I tried to explain that there's only one true God so any other god has to be a false god, then we talked about Jn 1:1 where their translation says Jesus '*was a god.*' I said there's 1 true God, so Jesus can't be '*a god.*' If he's not the one true God, he must be a false god? The JW said to me, '*no Jesus is a god, but the Father is the only Almighty God, Jehovah.*' I remember trying to get him to see the text says there's *one true God*, not *multiple* true gods, not Jehovah the Most High with a lower *god* named Jesus whom He created

[are you prepared to share who Christ is as God? If not, take notes]

v. 3 calls call the Father '*the only true God,*' just as 1 Cor 8:6 says about the Son '*there is...one Lord, Jesus Christ.*' There's only one Lord, Jesus Christ is Lord, but that doesn't mean God the Father isn't the Lord, as other verses call the Father 'Lord' (Lk 10:21), another verse says '*the Lord is the Spirit*' (2 Cor 3:17). Usually 'Lord' in the NT is used of Jesus but it doesn't mean the Father isn't the Lord God. Usually 'God' in the NT is used of the Father but that doesn't mean the Son isn't God, as other verses call Him God (John 1:1, 20:28, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13). The Trinity is one true God, 3 persons.

[are you ready to show that Scripturally? You may need to soon]

Ps 110:1 *The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand...[Father to Son]*
Isa 44:6 *Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.'*
There's 2 speaking in Isa 44:6 called LORD (Jehovah in ASV): Jehovah the King *and the Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts* say '*besides me there is no god*'!

God the Father says to His Son in Heb 1:8: *'Your throne, O God, is forever ...'* God calls His Son 'God'! The JW's recognized that disproved their false doctrine so they mistranslated that verse but they neglected to censor v. 6 in their NWT revisions from 1953-1970. Heb 1:6 in their 1970 NWT still had Jehovah saying of Jesus *'let all God's angels worship him.'* That's the same Greek word for *worship* in Rev 22:8-9 where God's angel refuses worship and insists worship is for God alone. So what angels say is only for God in God's Word, God calls all angels to do for Jesus. The JW who knocks on your door has been taught Jesus is an angel but Heb 1, that whole chapter is about how Christ is superior to the angels. Heb 1 is clear Jesus is no angel.

[all hail the power of Jesus name, all angels prostrate fall!]

The structure of Jn 17:3 also puts the Lord Jesus on par with or parallel with the one true God, on the same level in the language. No lesser being would dare put himself there. Michael the archangel would never say eternal life is knowing God *and knowing Michael*. Gabriel could never start a sentence to God like v. 5 *'glorify Me just like You and I used to be* in eternity past.' No created being can speak like v. 5 about existence with God before creation. By definition, someone/thing that's part of creation can't be before creation.

Jesus prays v. 5 as the co-existent co-eternal co-creator God the Son sharing the same nature as God the Father, sharing the same glory as the Father. His becoming man veiled His full glory voluntarily and temporarily, that's why some Scriptures while He's on earth sound like He's lesser than His Father. But His lowly incarnation in flesh will soon be reversed and glory restored to the glory the Trinity enjoyed in 3 persons before any being was created.

A Christmas hymn says *'mild He lays His glory by'* and *'Christ by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord ... veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity.'*² John saw the veil lifted at the transfiguration but if you turn to Jn 20 even doubting Thomas saw His deity in resurrection. In Jn 20, v. 27 Jesus *'said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."*²⁸ Thomas answered him, *"My Lord and my God!"* [note this is what Thomas said to him, to Jesus, he called Jesus 'my God!'] Even the JW translation of 2013 has Thomas say to Jesus *'my Lord and my God!'*²⁹ Jesus said to him, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Thomas seeing the glory of the risen Christ, Thomas overcoming doubts to call Jesus 'my Lord and my God' is the climax of the gospel. Jesus doesn't correct Thomas, He commends what he believed and speaks blessedness on all who believe without seeing Jesus physically but see Him as *my Lord and my God*. John wrote this so you too would believe Jesus is God the Son and by believing you may have eternal life. That's the context after Jn 17:3, He made clear eternal life is knowing God and believing Jesus is Lord and God

Back in Jn 1:1, it's also how John begins the gospel: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God* [Jesus, v. 14]. In the beginning, Jesus was with God (the idea is face-to-face on the same level) and Jesus was God. v. 3 says all things were made through Christ, nothing was made apart from Him, or in NASB '*all things came into being through Him.*' Jesus is not a created being, He created all beings. That's the same wording in John 17:3 for the glory Jesus had *with God* (face-to-face) before the beginning. Jn 1:18 *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.* No one has ever seen God the Father, but Jesus the God who is at the Father's side made Him known.

Here's a good cross-reference to write in your Bible for your next JW chat: Isa 43:10-11 '*You are my witnesses,*' declares Jehovah, "*...Before me no God was formed, And after me there has been none. I—I am Jehovah, and besides me there is no savior.*' That's in their own New World Translation 2013 ed., even their own text says besides Jehovah no God has been formed so Jesus can't be another god formed, like they say in Jn 1:1. It says besides Jehovah there's no savior even in their own translation of Isa 43:11. If there is no Savior besides Jehovah, and Jesus is the Savior, then Jesus is Jehovah.

That's the verse they get the name of their cult from '*you are my witnesses, declares Jehovah,*' and that very verse makes clear there's no God formed before or after Jehovah, and there's no savior except for Jehovah God. Isa 43:10-11, the verse the name Jehovah's Witnesses comes from, is a great passage to show Jesus as savior must be the only God and can't be created.

Isa 44:24 '*I am Jehovah, who made everything. I stretched out the heavens by myself.*' Their own Bible is clear Jehovah by Himself made everything so if Jesus made everything in Jn 1:3 as their own Bible says, Jesus is Jehovah the one and only true God, the creator of all. Jn 4:42 calls Jesus '*the savior of the world,*' even in the JW's translation which says there's no savior but Jehovah. There's only one Creator and Savior, one God: Father, Son, Spirit.

One more to write in your margin, Isa 42:8 *'I am Jehovah. That is my name; I give my glory to no one else'* [footnote: 'Or "I do not share my glory with anyone else."'] That takes us back to Jn 17:5 where Jesus prays to God the Father to give His glory to the Son. If Jehovah-God gives His glory to none but Himself, Jesus must be God to share glory God shares with no one else. Even Jesus calling God His Father in v. 5 was claiming to be equal with the Father as God. Even the JW translation says in 5:18 *'This is why the Jews began seeking all the more to kill him...because he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.'* Even *Father=equal nature with God.*

We've seen the identity of the one true God in Jn 17:3, the deity of Christ in v. 3 and v. 5, now thirdly finally: **The Glory of Eternal Life**

After mentioning eternal life in v. 3, Jesus says in v. 4: *I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.*

Within hours of praying this Jesus will be saying this *'it is finished,'* another way to say 'mission accomplished!' That's what v. 4 is anticipating, it's as good as done, a salvation not based on any good work we've done for Him, this eternal life is knowing the completed work of Christ for us to His glory.

[Phil 3 talks about the surpassing value of knowing Christ]

Mathematician Blaise Pascal as a young man 'had trouble with the spiritual equations of life, and he soon grew disillusioned with the pleasures of his fashionable society. One night he picked up a Bible and turned to John 17. As he began reading, verse 3 blazed out like a spark and seemed to set the room on fire ... His soul was instantly converted to Jesus Christ, and taking pen and parchment, he began quickly writing [Jn 17:3 with his testimony] ... Pascal's life was changed forever, and he became a powerful Christian thinker and writer. The scrap of parchment was found after his death sewed into the lining of his coat, that it might ever be close to his heart.³

Paul prayed that believers would have their hearts enlightened to know the riches of the glory of salvation in Him (Eph 1:18). He determined to know nothing more than Christ and Him crucified, to glory in the cross (1 Cor 2, Gal 6:14 KJV). Jer 9:23 *'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and **knows Me, that I am the LORD*** (NKJV) ... Knowing the Lord, eternal life is our glory. It's important for Christians to know what they believe and why and to be ready to defend the gospel but the most important reality to know here is the glory of eternal life and to want others to know the only true God and Christ

Jesus was sent to become truly man to accomplish a work of salvation for sinners. v. 4 says this work on earth was to glorify the Father, and in v. 5 after finishing His redeeming work on the cross He goes back to heaven to be glorified by the Father with the glory the Trinity enjoyed in eternity past. This is the glorious eternal life that we get in on if we know Father and Son. Do you know you have eternal life? Do you know God, do you know Jesus? The application of applications: how do we know God or know Jesus more?

DO YOU LOVE AND TRUST HIM? Remember the word for know in v. 3 isn't just awareness or apprehension, it includes affection and attachment. It isn't knowing intellectually, it's knowing intimately in a love relationship. The first time this word is used in the NT it's used of marriage intimacy for Joseph who didn't *know* Mary in that deepest sense till after Jesus was born (Mt 1:25). Obviously Joseph knew *who his wife was* before she gave birth, he didn't ask her in the manger scene 'wait, who are you? Do I know you?'

But this word for *know* is intimately or in a relationship. Do you love God? Do you love and trust Him? Rom 8:28 says '*for those who love God... we know God causes all things to work together for good*' – 'we know' there means 'we *trust* God is sovereignly working good for those who love Him' (which is another way to say those who know Him, we love and trust Him).

I know who President Obama is, I know facts about him ...

But I don't trust him or love him like I do the people in this room

I know many of you in this room

But I know my wife in a far different way, in a special intimate way

And she knows me, loves me and trusts me despite my sin

Knowing the Lord is being known/loved by Him too

DO YOU LOVE CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE? We'll see that future weeks later in Jn 17 but the same John wrote how we know if we truly know Him: 1 Jn 4:7–8 (KJV) *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.* [the context of 'one another' to John is especially the church, loving brothers in Christ shows we truly know God]. How are you showing love to Christ and your brothers or sisters in church?

DO YOU LISTEN TO CHRIST AND SEEK TO OBEY HIM? 1 John 2:3 *We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands* (NIV). That's not talking about perfection in obedience, but it is a new direction of life, a pattern of listening and wanting to obey helps us know we know Him

Jesus said ‘*my sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me*’ (10:27). You can look at Jn 10 to see that dynamic. A key way to know you know the Lord and He knows you savingly is this: do you follow Him, not perfectly, but do you purposefully listen to Him at church, reading Scripture and seeking to follow His voice? 10:14: *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.*

ARE YOU LEARNING AND GROWING IN KNOWING THE LORD?

Let me encourage you to listen to the Word of the Lord more if you want to know the Lord more. Some of you only average 2-3 sermons a month based on your attendance of our worship services, but each Lord’s Day there are 2 times you can hear the Lord speak in His Word. Let me urge you to make it a priority to be here more. The shepherds of this church desire the sheep of this flock to feed together in our morning and evening services so we grow more. In the pm series the good shepherd is about to lay down his life for us

Ps 92 says it’s good to worship God corporately in the morning and evening and Ps 100 commands ‘*Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*’ We’re commanded to know God continually corporately in worship. God also commands privately individually ‘*Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted...the Lord of hosts is with us...*’ We know He’s with us and for us. Ps 56:9 ‘*This I know, that God is for me*’

How do we know God? Through His Word and prayer. Ps 119, a psalm all about God’s Word, prays ‘*give me understanding that I may know,*’ v. 125, and in context, it’s through God’s Word that we know. Ps 25:4 is another prayer to pray: ‘*Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me...*’ Pray for it to make you know and praise Him for it in whatever He makes you know. Ps 139:14 NKJV ‘*I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.*’ Paul says ‘*I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day*’ (2 Tim 1:12 NKJV). Job said ‘*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth...*’ (Job 19:25 NIV). Isaiah 40:28 says ‘*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.*

We are weak, weary, tired people, but knowing God gives strength, power, waiting on the Lord in faith renews us so we can walk by faith and not faint, so we can rise up and soar like eagles. Isaiah says of those who know God, He knows us better than we know ourselves, better than we know the back of our hands, He knows us as graven on the palms of His hands (Isa 49:16). This is the God Jeremiah said knows the plans He has for us, His plans not to harm, but to bless and give hope and a future (Jer 29:11). This is the God Jeremiah also heard say ‘*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,*’ 1:5.

This is the God Ps 139 celebrates as knowing us intimately while intricately forming us fearfully and wonderfully in the womb and knowing all our days before there was one of them. Let me close with Ps 139’s beautiful words: *O LORD, You have searched me and **known** me. You **know** when I sit down and when I rise up...And are **intimately acquainted** with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, **You know it**...Such **knowledge** is too wonderful for me ... Search me, O God, and **know my heart**; Try me and **know my anxious thoughts**; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.* (v. 1-6, 23-24 NAS)

¹ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2015/12/18/the-briefing-12-18-15/>

² Charles Wesley, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.”

³ Robert J. Morgan, *From This Verse: 365 Scriptures That Changed the World* (Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2000).