

Hebrews 8:10-13

Knowing the Lord

...for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest – v. 11

We discovered in our last study of this chapter that we're living in good days. You might think so when you think about the wickedness of the world and the ungodliness of our culture. But when you think in terms of the history of redemption then you can't help but conclude that these are good days especially when compared with the Old Testament period of redemption.

This is the point that Paul is driving home in this chapter and in the next. A new day was dawning at the time this epistle was written. This was a difficult thing for the Hebrew Christians to grasp and accept. A new covenant or a new administration of the covenant of grace had begun. And it's described in v. 6 as a better covenant established upon better promises. And because this new covenant was now rising the way the sun rises in a new day the old covenant was being rendered obsolete and was ready to vanish away.

Last week we looked at the advantages to this new covenant and considered that it is better because the knowledge of God was immediate and our relationship to God was more intimate and our iniquities committed against God would be remembered no more. Now let me reiterate what I said last week regarding both of these covenants or these time periods that we refer to as the Old Testament period and the New Testament period.

Both have as their aim heaven and eternal life. Salvation is the same in either period. Salvation, since the fall of man, has ever been and will ever be by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And the grounds for salvation have always been and will always be the merits of Christ's life and Christ's death.

The primary difference between the Old Testament period and the New Testament period has to do with the administration of the covenant of grace during each separate time period. We commit serious error if we think that the Old Testament period was not a period of grace just like the New Testament period is a period of grace. The difference between the two periods consists of a difference in emphasis and a difference of clarity. The Old Testament period was a period where the emphasis was on the law but it would be a mistake to say that salvation during that period was through keeping the law.

Along with the moral law, you see, there was also given the ceremonial law and the ceremonial law foreshadowed the gospel. That is much easier for us to see in our day than it was for the Old Testament saints to see in their day but they did see it. Paul begins his epistle to the Romans by saying he was *A servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures* (Rom. 1:1,2). That's a strong statement of the unity between the two periods. The gospel was promised beforehand by the prophets in the holy scriptures.

Paul brings out the same truth again a little later in Romans when he begins his positive exposition of the gospel. Listen to what he says in Rom. 3:21 *But now the righteousness of*

God without the law is manifested in other words the righteousness that is imputed to believers, a righteousness that is totally outside of believers and that makes no reference to the believer's obedience or lack of obedience – this righteousness of God is now manifested – but then note what Paul says in the rest of 3:21 *being witnessed by the law and the prophets*. This gospel of imputed righteousness was witnessed by the Old Testament law and prophets.

This is so important for believers in our day to grasp. The gospel is found in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. And the failure of many that name the name of Christ to grasp that simple truth has led to a terrible exclusion of much of the Old Testament when it comes to the Christian life and when it comes to fully understanding and appreciating the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Now what I would like to do today before leaving Heb. 8 is to zero in on one of the advantages to this New Testament period. Notice what it says in v. 11 where we read *And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest*.

This is an incredible statement both in terms of the blessing it unfolds and the universality of that blessing. *All shall know me* the verse says. It reminds me of Christ's own statement in Jn. 17:3 *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*. And as I've said nearly every time I cite this verse – Christ is not only speaking of the duration of life but he's speaking of the quality of life. Life reaches its' highest potential and achieves its' greatest aim and finds its' greatest fulfillment when we come to know God and Jesus Christ.

So the blessing is great in our text, the blessing of knowing the Lord. But notice also the universality of the blessing – *for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest*. This blessing of knowing the Lord is not a blessing that is restricted to a superior class of spiritual giants, so to speak. It's a blessing that is common to all Christians – from the least to the greatest. You could call it the mark of a true Christian.

And this personal knowledge of the Lord becomes a distinguishing factor between those that are truly Christians and those who for whatever reasons have only an academic knowledge about the Lord without a personal and experiential knowledge of the Lord. I dare say that there will be many “theologians” so to speak in hell – men that devoted themselves in some degree to the study of God who never actually came to know God.

And so this advantage of knowing the Lord in this New Testament period of grace becomes a very important matter to understand aright. If understood and put into practice in a right way it leads to the greatest blessing attainable in this sin-cursed world. But as we'll see in the course of our study it also becomes something that is easy to misapply and abuse.

Knowing the Lord

This is our theme this morning. *For all shall know me, from the least to the greatest*, our text says in v. 11. And in analyzing this statement I have a number of points I want to make about this knowledge of God. Consider with me first of all:

I. The Nature of This Knowledge

The first thing we can say in this respect is that this knowledge is personal. *For all shall know me, from the least to the greatest*. And the reason this knowledge is personal is because God himself tends to it. *I will put my laws into their mind*, he says in v. 10, *and I will write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people*.

It's interesting to note here that in v. 11 the word *know* occurs twice. *And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and everyman his brother, saying, Know the Lord* – there's the first instance of the word. *For all shall know me, from the least to the greatest* – there's the second occurrence of the word and it's a different word in the Greek from the first occurrence of the word. And the application that can be drawn from the use of two different words, both translated *know* is that our knowledge of God which becomes our privilege to possess in this age is relative to the Old Testament period a much fuller knowledge and a more personal knowledge.

The first Greek term for *know* in this verse is often times used for the intimate knowledge that you find between a husband and wife. This use of the term is expressed negatively in the case of Joseph and Mary. We read in Mt. 1:24,25 *Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: ²⁵ And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS*.

It is this personal knowledge of God and of Christ that becomes the portion of every believer in Christ. Since this knowledge of God is personal it is also, as we noted last week, immediate. This is not the kind of knowledge that is taught. Note the beginning of v. 11 *And they shall not teach every man his neighbor saying, Know the Lord*. You've heard it said that there is no teacher like the teacher of experience. There are some things that can only be gained that way.

And that's the case with our knowledge of God and Christ. You either have it or you don't. It's not something that is merely imparted academically, it's something that is known experientially. A good illustration of this knowledge is found in Luke 24. You remember the case of the Emmaus road disciples? They're making their way home from Jerusalem to Emmaus – they're downcast and discouraged because their hopes had been raised so high that Jesus was the Messiah.

We read in vv. 15,16 of Lk. 24 that *it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. ¹⁶ but their eyes were holden that they should not know him*. There eventually followed one of the greatest Bible survey lessons ever given as we read of Christ in v. 27 that *beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*. They

learned a great deal academically in that lesson but it wasn't until later after they had reached their home and invited the unusual guest to stay with them that we read in v. 31 *And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.* When their eyes were opened you could say that the knowledge that had been imparted to their heads became reality to their hearts and then they knew him – knew him, not merely from an academic perspective, but they knew him personally. They recognized him for who he was and this personal and immediate knowledge so inflamed their souls that we read of them in v. 33 that *they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them.*

That verse has always amazed me especially given its setting. In the beginning of the narrative you find them dragging their feet in the dust as they make their way some 7 to 8 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. But now, with this personal and immediate knowledge of Christ imparted to their souls we read how that same hour in which Christ made himself known to them they go back over that 8 mile course in the strength of their new found devotion to Christ in order to report to the others that they had seen Christ.

And while they were making their report to the others we read of Christ appearing to them all. And we read in v. 44 *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.* ⁴⁵ *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.*

You see two things coming together in these verses. There is the objective truth of God's word being explained to the disciples and there is the subjective opening of their understanding, sometimes referred to as spiritual illumination. This is how the knowledge of God is imparted to the believer. This is what takes the things a believer knows in his head and brings it home to his heart.

And this is a privilege that belongs to all believers in this New Testament period of grace. This is the very thing that Paul prays for with regard to the Christians at Ephesus. So we read in Eph. 1:17 Paul's prayer *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:* ¹⁸ *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened...*

This is that personal and real and intimate knowledge of God that each believer has and that each believer needs to cultivate. And this leads me to my next point with regard to this knowledge of God – you've seen something of the nature of this knowledge. Consider with me next:

II. The Development of This Knowledge

It is our privilege in this age to know the Lord and to know him personally. *All shall know me from the least to the greatest* our text says. But it does not say that all shall know him to the same degree. And it's not hard to observe that are those among Christians that know the Lord better and more intimately than others. It's not that they're more

theologically adept than others. It's not that they take the time, necessarily, to read Hodges' Systematic Theology or John Owens 16 volume set on theology. It's more a matter of them adopting the practice of Mary, in Lk. 10, rather than Martha. Martha, you may recall, was cumbered about much serving but Mary had chosen that good part which was to sit at the feet of Christ. They both knew Christ, but since Mary had chosen that good part, and what Christ himself calls the *one thing needful* I think it would be fair to say that Mary's personal knowledge of Christ was higher and deeper and fuller than her sister, Martha's.

And so this personal knowledge of Christ becomes not just a privilege that belongs to the believer in this age, but it also becomes a challenge that the believer must rise to. And if you have, to use the Psalmist's expression *tasted and seen that the Lord is good* then it will become your desire to cultivate that experiential knowledge even further.

Perhaps nobody knew the Lord Jesus as intimately or as fully as the Apostle Paul. And yet it could certainly be said of Paul that the more he knew of Christ the more he wanted of Christ. And so he expresses this desire to the Philippians when he writes to them in Phil. 3:10 *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.*

This is a knowledge, then, that must be cultivated in the head and heart of the believer. And the way this knowledge becomes cultivated is by using the means of grace that God has ordained for this knowledge to grow. This is where the preaching of the gospel enters the picture.

There are some that abuse the text in Heb. 8:11 by saying that the text eliminates the needs for teachers and preachers. I suppose if you isolated the text and never bothered to compare it to the rest of the teaching of the New Testament you might arrive at that conclusion. But if you care to compare the text to other passages then you might find it odd that with the elimination of teachers and preachers Paul would say in Eph. 4:11,12 that among the gifts Christ has given to his church there is included *evangelists and pastors and teachers* ¹² *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

And in Titus 1:2,3 Paul speaks of his *hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;* ³ *But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior.* Underscore the phrase *God manifests his word through preaching.*

This is what takes preaching out of the realm of mere academic lecturing and lifts it to a spiritual means of grace. If preaching is approached right by the preacher and the listeners then you should gain more than a mere academic exposition of the word of God. You should, rather, gain a manifestation of Christ to your own soul. This is why you should pray for the preaching of God's word. This is why we meet on Wednesdays in order to pray for the preaching of God's word. This is why I feel compelled every time before I preach to pray that the message will not be perceived simply as a man's sermon but it will

be perceived as the very word God Himself would convey to the hearts of his people. I've said it often that there's nothing automatic about preaching. If it is not approached spiritually in the pursuit of developing our experiential knowledge of Christ then at best all it will amount to is a lecture that may or may not teach you something new.

So we develop our knowledge of God and Christ by tending to the preaching of God's word, as well as our own reading of God's word. We also tend to the development of our experiential knowledge of God through prayer. I referred to Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Eph. 1 – let me now call your attention to Paul's other prayer for the Ephesians found in Eph. 3. These two prayers of Paul are favorites of mine and in Eph. 3 you come away with some idea of the potential that exists for our personal knowledge of Christ to scale unsurpassed heights.

Let me read that prayer to you beginning in Eph. 3:14:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁵ Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,¹⁶ That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Strength in the inner man – Christ dwelling in your heart by faith – rooted and grounded in love – comprehending the breadth and length and depth and height of that love – knowing that which passes knowledge – being filled with all the fulness of God. I think you'll agree that this prayer of Paul's holds out the potential for our experience of Christ to be rich, to be full, and to be constantly rising.

And the thing that I love to point out about this prayer is that it is not presenting to us a high and lofty standard that can only be obtained by a few spiritual elite. No – it is in regard to the loftiness of this prayer in particular that Paul goes on to say in v. 20 *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,²¹ Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

God can do way more than what Paul's described in vv. 14-19 – that's what Paul himself is indicating in this benediction of vv. 20,21. And would you notice not only the words of Paul in these verses but just as importantly the example of Paul in these verses. What is Paul doing in these verses? He's praying – He's praying for the saints at Ephesus to grow in grace and in their knowledge of Christ's love. He's praying that they'll scale the heights of being filled with all the fulness of God.

This is what we must do as well. We must pray and seek the Lord and we must tend to the preaching of God's word and we must spend time in the reading of God's word. And in this way we enter into the experience of what our text tells us – *for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.*

And so we see the nature of this knowledge of God as well as the development of this knowledge of God. Could I say a word, briefly, in closing about:

III. The Effect of This Knowledge

For all shall know me, from the least to the greatest – our text says. The effect that knowledge had on Paul was that it made him willing to endure whatever he must for the cause of Christ. And he knew that if the Hebrews truly knew Christ and didn't simply know about Christ then they would be willing to endure all they were having to endure in terms of the trials and afflictions that were their portion.

The knowledge of Christ equips us to endure, then, because the absolute truth of the gospel becomes a settled issue in the believer's heart. You may recall that I made this observation often when we studied the book of Acts a few years ago. When it came to those early Christians found in the book of Acts – you could arrest them – you could chase them away from their familiar surroundings – you could even put some of them to death, but you could not silence them nor could you rob them of the peace and joy that was their portion. And the reason you couldn't suppress them or rob them was because they knew Christ – they knew he had died for their sins and they knew he was risen from the dead.

If I could direct your attention for a moment back to those Emmaus road disciples in Lk. 24. Once their eyes were opened so that they knew Christ they would rise in the strength of that knowledge and go, that same day, back 8 miles to Jerusalem. *Did not our heart burn within us, they say in v. 32 while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

The knowledge of Christ, then, will light a fire of devotion and service in the believer's heart and it will be his desire and aim in all that he does to make the name of Christ known and to extend Christ's kingdom.

If I can refer to just one more passage of scripture – 2Pet. 1 where we read in v. 2 *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.*

Grace and peace are multiplied to us through our knowledge of God – and his divine power gives us all that we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue. Here the effect of our knowledge of God is that it contributes to our sanctification. It is as we know him, whom to know is life eternal, that we'll be motivated to pursue holiness and to overcome the world and the flesh.

I hope you are able to see, then, just how necessary, indeed – how foundational this blessing of knowing God becomes. I wonder, as we bring our meeting to a close – do you know him? If you do then your desire will be to get to know him more. And if you don't, I hope you'll be honest enough to admit it and then apply yourself to seeking him until you do gain a saving and sanctifying interest in him.