

The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ

Series on Philipians

By Rev. David Overway

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Hope Protestant Reformed Church

1580 Ferndale Ave. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

Website: www.hopeprchurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/hopeprc

For our Scripture reading we turn once again to Philipians 3. We'll read that chapter together.

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. 3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. 4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. 16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. 17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. 18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you

often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) 20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: 21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Thus far we read in the word of God.

Our text is verse 8 of the chapter. Verse 8, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." Paul has warned us and we've looked at that already, that warning already. He has warned us to beware of dogs; to beware of evil workers. And we notice that that meant all those who add anything to the work of Christ as a requirement for salvation, anyone who adds anything to the work of Christ and says, "That other thing in addition to the work of Christ is a requirement in order for you to be saved." Anyone who does that and teaches that is a dog or an evil worker according to this Spirit-inspired Apostle Paul.

The apostle goes on after giving us that warning to add to that warning, verse 3, he says, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." He says nothing that is of the flesh that might be added to the work of Christ. All of that we have no confidence in that which is earthly, that which is of the flesh. We rejoice, rather, in Christ Jesus. That word "rejoice" there is "to glory in Christ," and carries with it the idea of having confidence in Christ. Then he says we have confidence in Christ, well, at the same time having no confidence in the flesh.

Some may have said to the Apostle Paul, "Paul, you speak of Christ because you cannot please God the way that we say you must. We have the way of salvation and we have told you that way of salvation and everyone knows that way of salvation, but you can't walk in that way. You don't measure up and so you must have invented this idea of Christ; you have invented another way to God, a false way to please God, coming to him through Christ." Here in our text and in the context, the Apostle Paul answers such accusations and in so doing, he makes it even more clear how glorious is his Savior and our Savior and so the passage before us is set before us in order to extol the glory of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but in addition to that, the passage is also set before us as a kind of example to us that we might take the words of the Apostle Paul, that we might look through his eyes that we may adopt his thinking on the subject and make the same confession he makes of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The apostle speaks in verse 17 and he says, "Brethren, be followers together of me," in other words, live and confess as I live and as I confess. "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample," as an example. With that in mind, then too, seeking to be stirred up to follow the Apostle Paul in viewing

Jesus Christ and the knowledge of Christ as most excellent, we consider the text under the theme, "The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ." The excellency of the knowledge of Christ. First of all, a glorious knowledge; secondly, a radical accounting; and thirdly, a willing exchange. A glorious knowledge, a radical accounting, and a willing exchange.

The apostle speaks here, beloved, of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord. He speaks with enthusiasm. He speaks from the heart. He means for us to agree with him and see and know with him the excellency of that knowledge. To do that then, to help us to see and to glorify his Savior, help us to see the excellency of our Savior and to glorify him, he uses three of the most common names of our Savior in the Scripture: he speaks of him as Jesus and as Christ and as Lord. And when he speaks of knowledge of him, he means too that we think knowledgeably about these names; we think knowledgeably about our Savior and as God has willed it, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of our Savior, is revealed to us through names, the names of our Savior.

The excellency, then first of all, of the knowledge of our Savior as Jesus, Jehovah's salvation. That's Jesus. The Triune God's provision for our salvation. That's Jesus. Or to put it another way, Jehovah as Savior. And look at that name, Jesus, from that point of view, we recognize that Jesus is Jehovah. He is God himself. He is the Triune God in human flesh and with a human nature, and like unto us. But then too, Jehovah incarnate as our Savior. God come to us. God with us and come to us in order to save us. That's Jesus. To save his people from their sins. Jesus came to save his people, God's people, the elect whom God has chosen in eternity from their sins, from the guilt of their sins, from the power of sin so that sin is not the dominant power in their lives; so that they're not captive unto sin and a slave to sin.

Jesus, the Savior from sin and from the consequences of sin which is eternal punishment and judgment and destruction. Jesus, Jehovah's Savior, is the one who saved his people from their sins; who saved us from our sins by suffering. That's Jesus, the one who willingly lay upon that cross and did not withdraw his hand when the hammer was raised to drive the spike into his hands, but who actually submitted to that death and submitted to the suffering of having the wrath of God poured out upon him in order to save us from our sins. Jesus, as the one who arose then too, from that death; rose with everlasting life; who rose as Savior; and who arose with the promise that he will come again. That he will come again, and when he comes again, Jesus is the one with whom we will live everlastingly. God as our Savior, Jesus.

The excellency too, the apostle speaks, the excellency of the knowledge of our Savior as Christ, as Jesus, for that brings out many aspects of who he is, but then also as Christ for that brings out a whole other landscape of excellencies and beauties of our Savior. He is the Mediator, the one appointed by God to stand between ourselves and God, the official representative of God's people, the one who is ordained by God, given the right to be in office by God and then anointed into that office, qualified to serve in that office as Christ. A threefold office, it is. The office of prophet, the office of priest, and of king. One office with three aspects.

The excellency of the knowledge of Christ is that we know him as prophet. The one who knows God because he is God, and the one who has been officially ordained and anointed by God to speak about God. That's what he does as our prophet. He comes to us and he tells us things that we could never imagine though we would employ of our powers and call upon the most imaginative individuals in the world. We could never imagine those things which come out of the mouth of Christ, our prophet, speaking to us and revealing to us the Almighty, our Father, our covenant God.

And he is as Christ also our priest. The excellency of the knowledge of him too is to know him as our priest, the one who leads unto God, directly unto God. The one who leads us personally unto God and the one always remember, as our priest who leads us unto God. As every good priest would do in the Old Testament, so too Christ now in a far superior way leads us unto God but he does so by sacrificing himself. Not by taking the lamb or the bullock that we would bring, not by providing his own lamb, but providing himself as the sacrifice, and in so doing, as our priest, he opens the way for us into that inner sanctum, that Holy of Holies, that secret place where we can enter and dwell with and commune with the most high, mighty, holy God. As our priest, he's the one too, who continually lives to make intercession for us; to receive our prayers and our offerings and our sacrifices; to cleanse them, make them acceptable before God and pour out upon us the blessings of salvation. The tenderest mercy, remembering all of our weakness and our frailties.

The excellency of the knowledge of Christ means also that we know him as our king enthroned and glorious. That's Christ. Enthroned and glorious, sovereign king. The one who came to this earth and died upon the cross in order to fight our battles and who yet today fights for us, fights our battles as our king, the one who through battle protects us from our enemies and blesses us with all the blessings of peace and prosperity as we live in his kingdom, brought into his kingdom by his own grace and by his own work.

Then too, the apostle goes on to speak of the excellency of the knowledge of our Savior as Lord. Jesus, Jehovah's salvation, Christ as prophet, priest and king, the anointed of God, and then also our Lord, that is, the one who owns us; the one to whom we belong. Excellency of the knowledge of Christ as Lord is to know that he is the one who purchased me, who redeemed me. He paid the price for me not with silver and gold though all of it was at his disposal but with his own precious blood, he purchased me and now I belong to him and he cares for me because I am his. He loves me and he is also my Master and my Ruler. As my Lord, he is that too, and works in me a bowing of the knee, a humble submission unto himself so that I begin to walk as he walks. He begins to work in me as my Lord those graces so that I walk as prophet and as priest and as king in the midst of this world. Hearing him as my prophet, understanding the word of God and confessing that word of God together with him. And as priest, enjoying his mercy so that then too, I can be merciful unto others. And as he rules over me, he makes me by his power sincerely willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.

But it must be emphasized though we have brought it out already, it must be emphasized that this knowledge of our Savior spoken of in the text is the knowledge of faith. It's a knowledge of faith. It's not simply an intellectual apprehension of certain truths, that kind of knowledge that we may acquire if we were to go to an institution of higher learning and hear all about a particular subject and absorb all of that into our minds, this is more than that kind of knowledge, this is the knowledge of faith. The Apostle Paul indicates that when he speaks of "my Lord," and by that he means also "my Christ and my Jesus."

My Lord. Remember, that's part of faith. Faith is a personal knowledge, a knowledge of him, of the Savior, as one who is of infinite benefit to us; one who is of advantage to us, to use those constantly reoccurring words of the questions of our Heidelberg Catechism. What advantage to you is it to know this or that? Of what benefit is it to you to have this or that truth or understanding? Speaking of the knowledge of faith. The excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Lord, is the excellency of knowing him as my Lord. My Lord. My Owner. My Master. My Ruler. My Christ. The excellency of the knowledge of him is to say, "He is my prophet, my priest and my king. He is my Jesus. He is Jehovah as my Savior from all of my sins and has given me everlasting life through his work."

And then what's more is that this knowledge is the knowledge of him. Certainly it's a knowledge about all about him. It's a knowledge about the benefits that he is to us, the advantage that he is for us, but it's also the knowledge of him rather than only about him. One must know about him. We don't play that down this evening. One must know about him. One must know all about him. In fact, one who knows Christ desires to know about him, longs to grow in his knowledge about Jesus Christ, his Lord. One must know about him in order to know him, really. The more that we know about him, the more that we can say we know him, truly know him, but we must never rest satisfied with only a knowledge about him. That's a temptation. That's always a temptation to say, "I know all about Christ. I know all about Jesus. I know all about the Lord. I can recite it. I can tell you all about it. I know all the answers of the Essentials Book. I understand the Creeds. I understand the Scripture. I've read a lot of books. I know all about him." But that's not what the text is ultimately talking about. That doesn't reach high enough. The goal in the calling of the child of God is not only to know about Christ but to know him personally and experientially. To know him is what is so excellent according to the text.

That's what the apostle has come to see and that knowledge he here extols for Paul had known prior to coming to know Christ personally, the Apostle Paul had known all about Christ. He knew all about him. Maybe "all" is too broad of a word but he knew about Christ, certainly he did. He knew about Christ in the Scriptures from the Old Testament. He did not believe in him. He did not know him personally, that would come later, but he knew about him. He knew about him also from the witness of the Christians, those who believed in Christ, those who did know Christ. He listened to them. He heard their witness. He heard their preaching. He understood what they stood for and he said, "They know Christ but from them I know about Christ," and therefore he persecuted them.

His knowing about Christ is what led him to persecute the church, but by God's grace, the Apostle Paul came to know Christ. To rise above a simple intellectual knowledge about

Christ, he came to know Christ. You say that began on the road to Damascus when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him, rebuked him, called him up short, but continued, no doubt, in the years in the wilderness as he was taken away by the Lord and instructed by him, and as the Lord said, "Here, this is who I am." He revealed himself to the apostle and the apostle came to know him personally as a friend, as his Savior, as his Christ, as his Lord, and in that there was a marked difference, a marked difference from knowing about Christ to knowing Christ.

Examples can help us gain some understanding of that. If you think of knowing all about the ocean, perhaps you've seen many pictures or a person has seen many pictures of the ocean, he's heard descriptions of the ocean, even vivid descriptions by very good authors or those who have seen it firsthand. They could tell him all about the ocean, he knows about it but he doesn't know the ocean, not until he goes there and he stands on the shore and he hears the sound of the waves and he feels the cool waters around his feet and he smells the smells of the ocean wafting into his nostrils. Then he knows not about, but he knows the ocean.

The same thing could be said of one who studies a particular food, let's say he studies ice cream and he knows all about ice cream. He can tell you all about the ingredients and all where it comes from and all how it's made and all how this and that ingredient all need to be in the proper proportion to one another, and how to care for it and cool it and how to serve it best, and all the rest. He knows all about it but he has a severe dairy allergy and he's never tasted a bite of ice cream in his life. Does he know it? All of us would say he doesn't know. Then a little child, a little child might charitably smile and maybe become more frustrated than that if this individual said, "I know ice cream. I'm going to tell you all about it." And he began on a long tirade of all the details and scientific facts about that particular food while the child enjoys a bowl of it in front of him, the child says, "You don't know. You really don't know. I know. I know what ice cream is."

So too, in fact, far more is this knowledge of Christ that the apostle is talking about. Not knowing all about him in facts and in details but knowing Christ, that's what is so excellent. That's the superior knowledge that the apostle speaks of. It's beyond words. We recognize that too. We can express something of it, we can get at something of it with words. That's the value of doctrine. That's the importance of careful words and definitions and use of those in our doctrine, but we must never believe and we must never lead one another to think that we've said it all when we've said, but words, knowing Christ, is far beyond that, isn't it? It's far beyond that. Try to explain it to someone. You who know Christ, try to explain it to someone in fine detail and fully, we quickly come up against the limits of our abilities and even of language.

Excellent in knowledge. So excellent, so glorious is this knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and with that new knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord, the Apostle Paul does some accounting and we follow his example in that too. He does some accounting. The word "count" is used two times in the text. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." Again, in the verse

just previous to our text, verse 7, he uses the word again, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." When he uses that word "counting" it means an accounting or a consideration, a very careful activity of the mind as one might account of funds; as he might think of how much this is and how much that is and put them all in the ledger appropriately in their proper place so that he may come to a bottom line understanding of where a particular business stands or perhaps his own household. The Apostle Paul here is making an evaluation after weighing the facts and the circumstances.

He values, or rather he accounts all things, that's the way he expresses it in our text, verse 8, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He lists those things or at least some of those things in the previous verses, verses 5 and following. He says, "I have confidence in the flesh, or I have the right to have confidence in the flesh. If confidence in the flesh is the thing, well, I certainly have that. Don't let anyone think that I have gone to Christ and now value the knowledge of Christ as most excellent because I have nothing to boast of with regard to the flesh. I certainly do. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee," the most rigorous law keepers that there were, at least externally. "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church. That's how zealous I was. I persecuted the church. Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He's saying, "Those were things that I held up as value. Those were things that I counted important as that which would bring me into the good pleasure of God; that which would bring me salvation," in short. He thought those things were valuable, he says. They were gain to him. They were of advantage to him.

Now he counts them again. He counts them quite differently. He counts them loss, he says in the text. He counts all those things loss, meaning disadvantage. "All those things that I held up previously as being so important and of such a great advantage to me before God, now I count them great disadvantage to me. In fact," he says, "I count them as I evaluate things and look at them carefully and consider them with my mind very carefully, I count them but dung, spoiled food and excrement." Count them but dung, stinking filth, the kind of stuff, to our disgust, the kind of stuff that only dogs prize. "Beware of such," the apostle has already said. "Beware of such, dogs who value that kind of stinking filth. I count it loss. I count it dung. As I might hold it up, there is a reason for God to look upon me favorably."

You could speak of many reasons why the Apostle Paul looks at it in that way. One of those comes out in the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 7:21-23. We'll read just 22 and 23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" They're saying, "Look," at in the judgment day they're going to say to the Lord, "Look at what all we have done. Look at our works. Look at those things which should be of value to thee." And Jesus says, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. I never knew you. I never knew you in love. I never called you my own. I was never your Christ, your Jesus, your Lord. I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." And that's the point. The apostle saw all that he had done before and all that he counted so great before, all that he had said, "This is valuable. This is good stuff." Now he looks

back at it and he says, "It was only the working of iniquity. That's what it was for I was doing it all in order to earn the favor of God and to secure my salvation. It was then the working of iniquity. It was sin."

Then too, the Apostle Paul looks at all these things, all things which before they were lost, and when he still counted them something, he realizes now that all those things had made him the enemy of Christ, rather than as he imagined, his ally and his friend. Jesus had addressed him such. That way is well remembered on the Damascus Road, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? You're behaving as my enemy with all your zeal and with all your good works and all that you hold up as so valuable. I count it but the actions of an enemy." And how the apostle sees it and he values it as dung, as refuse, as loss.

But then too, in comparison to Christ, in comparison to the knowledge of Christ, in comparison to that living relationship of friendship that he has now with Christ, in comparison to that, he counts them as they are. He says he counted them and in the passage he also uses that verb in another way and says he is still counting them that way because he knows Christ now; he knows the excellency of Jesus Christ his Savior, his Lord. And now he says, "All the rest turns color, as it were, before my very eyes now that I have seen with the eyes of faith my Savior, my Christ, and my Lord." He looks upon all things now radically differently. A radical change in his accounting of things because it was a complete change. He looks at all these things and they are exact opposite from how he had viewed them before, but also a radical accounting in that he includes all things, notice that too, all things, everything is loss if it were to be held up by him and looked at by him as something that must come alongside of Christ; as something which would compete with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. As it would stand in that position, he says, "I am ready to call all things, and I have evaluated and accounted all things as dung, as garbage." And he does not then go through the garbage, through that great pile of dung, hunting for that one piece of pungent refuse to pull that out of the pile and treasure it and attempt to clean it up and bring it home and value it highly. He says its all of it, every last bit of it is refuse and dung. All things are now counted loss, disadvantage.

That's also how we must look at all things that would stand over against the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the excellency of that knowledge. Paul is certainly talking here, especially about those who are religious as he was. He's pointing out there's a particular danger about being religious. The Apostle Paul, remember, was very religious, very zealous. He counted himself quite the man of the church, quite a mighty man for God. He didn't think a lot about earthly things, at least not the kind of earthly things we normally think of as earthly things, he thought about church things; he thought about spiritual things, although altogether from a carnal and earthly point of view. But he was a religious man and he says, "All of that piety, all of that that I held up as so great and so important, I see it now as nothing, worthless, as it compares with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." And that too, is how we ought to live.

But then too, though the apostle doesn't explicitly speak of it, there is also that tendency and, again, a very great temptation to us that we look at earthly things and we count those

earthly things as those things which can give us comfort and peace and security and happiness. All the things that God promises us are ours in Christ, we turn to this word and to the things of this world and we're tempted to say, "I'll find it there. I'll find it in those." But we too, must engage our minds and evaluate all these things and look at them as they really are and see them plainly and do a good clear accounting, a faithful accounting of all these things and look at them as they compare with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and look at them as how they do violence against that knowledge of Christ and stand over against that knowledge of Christ, and then account those too but loss, but dung compared to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

Because beloved, of that grace led accounting of things, the apostle also made an exchange. In his own life, in his own thinking, in his own heart, as far as those things that he would cling to and those things that he would long for, those things that he would seek after, he says, "I will make an exchange," and so he did. He uses the language of suffering loss. He suffered the loss of all things, that is, forfeited them. He forfeited them and turned his back upon them. He said that, "They are nothing and I will not pursue them and I will not continue in them," and now he looks and he says, "I will suffer the loss of all those things that I might win Christ; that I might procure an advantage; make a profit," again using accounting terms, "make a profit in Christ, and gain evermore and more of the knowledge of him, that intimate, personal knowledge of him." Why does he make that exchange? Why is he so willing to forfeit all things, all that which made him a man of quite some standing in his community and in that which was called church at the time? Why was he willing to suffer all of that loss and forfeit all of that that he might know Christ? Ultimately the answer is found only in God alone and only in God's grace. Not because he could of his own without any grace of God, by himself, account of all things and see it all clearly and make a good rational decision, that he would pursue after and have Christ and turn his back on all of these earthly things. Not because he found Christ as he looked at all the things that came before his mind, but because the Lord Jesus Christ found him, beloved. That's how it was too in his life, wasn't it? It was bent on his own destruction as he pursued the church seeking to persecute them, breathing out threatenings and curses against the church and on he went along the way to the next town to see if he could find some more and imprison some more and make them more miserable and the Lord stood before him, the Lord found him in grace. Jesus Christ found him and worked in his heart that radical change, that radically different accounting of all things; that he could see all that he had counted gain before as nothing but loss now by the voice of Jesus Christ. All that work took place in his heart. All that changing took place.

But also, beloved, that grace enlightened him and made him know that all these things that he had clung to before and that he had valued so highly, that he had counted gain and of great advantage to himself, the grace of God worked in his heart and enlightened him so that he knew all those things, in fact, if he were to continue pursuing after them, would deprive him of knowing Jesus Christ and growing in the knowledge, the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord. He came to know by the grace of God that all things must be willingly given up before one can know Christ and fully extol the excellency of the knowledge of him. That grace of God, God works in the hearts of all of his people.

The grace of God he's worked in our hearts as a whole organically. Let each of us face that reality and that calling too, and especially let those who have not valued the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as highly as they ought, or do not value at this point yet at all the knowledge of Christ, but hold to those earthly things, let them hear the calling. Count it all loss, beloved.

And those of us in whose hearts God has already begun to work and I speak to myself as well as to you, continue. Continue to press on, calling all of it loss. Accounting all of it as it is. Look at it as so much dung to be thrown out, that you might pursue the knowledge of Christ and grow in your covenant relationship and fellowship and love with him. The knowledge of Christ is excellent. Held above, better than, surpassing all that otherwise or else might be known or valued in this world. Believe that, beloved, and by God's grace, you do. By that same grace of God whereby he found the Apostle Paul and arrested him on the Damascus Road, by that same grace of God, he has enlightened your eyes, hasn't he and he has made you see and know all is but loss. And I will suffer all loss, I will forfeit it all that I might know and have the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Thank God, beloved, that he has so worked that grace in you. Amen.

Father, we thank thee for thy holy word, and we thank thee for Jesus, our Savior. We know him by thy grace and we love him. Until we can fast with sorrow, that we see in our own hearts and in our own lives, that we value far too much other things and we do not cling as we ought with confidence to Jesus Christ and him alone and the knowledge of him. We do not hold that above all else to walk with him, to be near unto him, to commune with him. But, Father, forgive us, we pray. Yet again forgive us and grant us more of thy grace that thou might work in us more and more to suffer the loss of all things that we might gain more and more a relationship with Jesus Christ, our Savior. Lead us, Father, by thy sovereign grace in that way and we thank thee. Though words do not express it as we would wish, we thank thee that thou hast begun to work that in us and that we too can say with the Apostle Paul, "All things, all things are accounted loss as compared to the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord and my Savior." In his name we pray these things. Amen.