

# The necessity of knowing God

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[ 0 : 00 ] John chapter 17, John chapter 17 and looking at verse 3. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only through God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

There's a famous incident in the life of W.C. Burns who was minister at Kilsai and associated with that famous revival there.

He was one time in Glasgow and his mother noticed him walking towards her. Then he suddenly disappeared down an alleyway or a close as he came towards her.

And when she went out to look for him she found him down in that alleyway, broken and weeping profusely. And she said to him, William, what ails thee? What's making thee ill?

And he said, Mother, as I saw the crowds, as they poured forth hither and thither, my heart could endure it no longer.

[ 1 : 10 ] For I did see them as entering a lost eternity. If God would only grant us something of his burden today as we look at this text together.

That we would consider something of the value of a human soul and how near we are to eternity.

That we would consider the great multitude that flows today as a great river into eternity without this knowledge and so without eternal life.

That we might even consider it for ourselves as we come to look at this text of the necessity of knowing God so as to have eternal life here and now.

We're going to look at God willing at a series of studies on this subject that's brought up for us in this text of the knowledge of God or our knowing God.

[ 2 : 31 ] And it's going to bring us into some of the most beautiful texts of the Bible. Some of the texts that speak to us specifically, we're going to confine our studies to these texts, that speak to us specifically of this subject of knowing God.

We're beginning with this particular definition of eternal life which the Lord himself sets out by way of knowing God. This is eternal life that they might know thee.

They, that's to say, those that are to be given eternal life by himself. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

And this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. The necessity of knowing God to have eternal life.

But then we think also of other texts that will come up in our studies, either as texts that will form a text for a sermon, and as will be brought up during the course of our studies on these, on this theme, God willing.

[ 3 : 49 ] Think of texts, for example, where the love of Christ is mentioned in Ephesians. And to know, says Paul, the love of Christ. Think of the text that specifically mentions the knowledge of Christ himself in association with this text.

You remember that Paul said to the Corinthians, like, determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. You remember the wonderful words of his testimony in Philippians 3.

We've mentioned it many times, we've looked at it more than once, where he says that he himself counted these things as done, these things that he once held as important to know, that I might know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his self-sufferings.

That I might know him. Think of the wonderful Old Testament text. Think of the book of Psalms. Psalm 9. They that know thy name will place their trust in thee.

Think of Psalm 89. Words that we sing so often. Blessed are they that know the joyful psalm. Think of Psalm. Think of the prophecy of Hosea that has to do so much with knowing God, as set out in the prophet's own life and relationship to his wayward wife.

[ 5 : 09 ] Think of the wonderful way that he speaks of knowing God. Repentance leading into the knowledge of God.

Then shall we know, he says, if we follow on to know the Lord. The knowledge of God. This knowing of God.

How important it is. How central it is. How crucial it is. Because it is in it that we find eternal life.

That brings us back to our text for this morning. This is eternal life. That they might know thee. Now notice firstly, the emphasis on eternal life.

And the Bible has to do with eternal life, as you well know, from beginning to end. It is the emphasis of Scripture to bring us to consider and to know, to handle possession, eternal life.

[ 6 : 13 ] It begins with the paradise out of which we fell into deadness and sin. And it ends with the paradise into which God is pleased to bring us.

In the enjoyment of eternal life and fullness. In between is the story, the account of how we came into that deadness and how we are rescued from it in Jesus Christ.

The definition of eternal life is that we are given it in the Gospel. We are offered this life in Jesus Christ. The life that has been procured by him that is offered to us in the Gospel.

What a great offer that is. When it is eternal life that is offered to us who are dead in trespasses and sins. Who are unworthy of the least mercy from God. And yet he offers to us today eternal life in all its fullness, in all its glory.

In Jesus Christ, in the knowledge of himself. And you notice he says, this is what it consists in.

[ 7 : 22 ] This is eternal life. That they might know thee, the only true God. Now Jesus is not saying, this is eternal life.

That they will be brought to know thee in heaven. Or something like that. He's not saying, this will be eternal life. When they come to know thee, once they have been brought out of this world and into the glory that heaven is.

He is saying, this is eternal life that they might know thee. In other words, as soon as the knowing begins, so the actual possession of eternal life begins.

It is impossible to know God and not actually have eternal life. There's nothing wrong with saying, this is eternal life when we will be brought to heaven to know God there.

That will be eternal life. That will be eternal life in its fullness. That will be eternal life in perfection.

That will be eternal life far more than we are able to enjoy it or know it or experience it or possess it in this life.

[ 8 : 39 ] But that does not mean that eternal life begins at the entrance point to heaven when we actually enter into heaven. And that's the beginning of the enjoyment of eternal life.

Far from it. Blessed be God. That is far from being the case. This is eternal life that they might know thee. As soon as you come to know God, you come to have eternal life.

You come into the enjoyment and the possession of the eternal life that will ever be enjoyed in heaven. The moment you come to know God as your God, as your Saviour in and through Jesus Christ.

The moment you come to know Jesus Christ whom he has sent into the world as the true God as well as God the Father. The moment you come to know that. That is the emphasis we want to lay on this at this moment.

This is eternal life that they might know thee and Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 50 ] It is the same as the eternal life in heaven. The same in substance. The same in kind.

Though not the same in degree.

It is the same in essence. Because it is the knowledge of God. What is heaven? Heaven is knowing God. Perfectly.

Not fully. Nobody can know God fully in everything there is about him. Fully even in heaven itself.

We will still have a limited capacity compared to all that is true about God.

But heaven is essentially knowing God perfectly. Knowing him in the enjoyment of bliss and of happiness and ending forever more.

That is heaven. Knowing God. But so is this life. Here in this world eternal life is in your possession.

[ 10 : 50 ] You have come into eternal life in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. When you know God you have eternal life. Let nobody delude you.

Let nobody take you aside from this particular fact. This is the definition of eternal life that he gives us here. That he, that we should know him the only through God.

And so obviously it is important to know something of what this knowing of God is. The most important thing of all is to have it.

To exercise it. To have this knowledge for ourselves. To be ourselves among those who know God. But the Bible gives us much that we can say about this knowledge.

And that brings us to our second point which is the emphasis on knowing the only through God.

And the first thing I want to say that is there is that the text obviously brings out for us something that we're going to insist upon and repeatedly emphasize throughout these studies.

[12:08] It will come up again and again because it is of central crucial importance. And it is this. That it is the knowing that belongs to personal relationship.

It is the knowing that belongs to personal relationship. Jesus does not say here that this is eternal life to know about the only through God.

He does not say this is eternal life to learn about God. To go through a program of education. To attend theological courses. To go to places where you know something about the Trinity and the attributes of God.

We're not in any way setting out to deprecate these things. Or such learning obviously. You know that's not the case. But you can have all of these things.

In terms of learning. In terms of theological education. It happens indeed. In any case as the gospel is being preached.

[13:12] And it ought to be the case as the gospel is being preached. That we grow in our learning of these things. But that is not the knowing that Jesus is speaking about.

At best these things, though they are important in themselves, are the means by which we come to this knowing. The learning of these things of scripture.

The learning of God and his attributes. The learning about him that we do from the Bible. Is so that we will come to know him.

Knowing about him. Knowing about him. Must lead to knowing him. Knowing of his attributes.

Knowing of his works. Knowing of his works. Must lead us to knowing himself. To the knowing of a personal relationship with him. That is saving.

That's why it's a saving knowledge that this is usually described as. You hear people talking about saving knowledge.

[14:18] To distinguish it from the knowledge of things. From the knowledge about things that we can have without saving knowledge. But you cannot have this knowledge without it being saving knowledge.

of the knowledge of a personal relationship with God, the knowledge that has with him that union with him in Christ, that is, says Jesus, eternal life.

It's very interesting that when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that he spoke about his burden for the Jews, his burden for them that they would come to know God to have eternal life. Brethren, he said, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For he says, I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

Did these Jews not know about God? Did they not know their Old Testament scriptures? Was it not the case, as we saw last time with Nicodemus, that he was a teacher in Israel, that he had a knowledge about God that was almost second to none in the time in which he lived? What does Paul say? That they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

Why tell the next verse of that chapter 10? For they, going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.

[15:56] And that verse may be true of people here today. It's not just applicable to Jews, it's applicable to every Gentile as well that has not come to know God savingly in the personal relationship with them. It is true of every single one of us by nature. It is true of every single one of us as we are in ourselves. That verse of Romans 10 is so applicable to every single one of us till we come to know the Lord for ourselves. We can even have a concern for biblical values that they will be applied to society. We can lament many of the things that we find happening in our society, but even that itself is not the same as this knowledge. Not if it is without personal relationship with God. It still means that we are going about seeking to establish our own righteousness. And not submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God. Submission to Christ

God is submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God and so coming to know God personally for ourselves. There are many people in the world that will say of themselves that they are definitely

Christians.

But sadly, they don't know God. They have a name, but they don't have this essence of it in the definition that Christ himself gives. This is eternal life that they might know Thee. We can illustrate it very simply really this way I think.

You would not say today, I'm sure any of us here if we were asked the question, do you know the Queen? You would not say, yes, I know the Queen? You would say, I know about her. You would say you've seen her. You would say that you've heard her speaking.

But you would not say, yes, I actually know her. You might be patriotic enough even to have a photo of her somewhere in your house. Or a picture of her in your wall, or a picture of her in your wall, as used to be often the case. But that's very different to a personal knowledge of her.

[ 18 : 12 ] But then when you ask, do you know your best friend? Do you know your husband, your wife, your best friend in this life?

That's a very different kind of knowledge, isn't it? To the knowledge that you have of the Queen, or somebody famous like that, that you've heard and that you've seen, that you'll be able instantly to pick out of a crowd, but that you couldn't say.

That you know, but you cannot say that about your best companion, about your heart mate.

Because you know them in a personal relationship. You share things with them. Your interests are developed together.

You enter more and more into those things that interest you one with another. You come to know one another more and more as you go on. Everything you do is within this wonderful relationship of knowledge, of the knowing of a person, personally in relationship.

You explore and you develop that relationship in love and in familiarity and in intimacy. You can say that it is all to do with knowing them. And the more you know them, the more you will love them.

[ 19 : 34 ] And how much more is that eminently true of God? Do we know God today for ourselves?

Is this definition of Jesus, is it something that you understand from your own experience? Is it something that you who know the gospel so well and have heard it so often, can say of yourselves, that your knowledge of God from these things has actually brought you to know himself?

That is the vital point. Don't miss it out. Whatever you do today, whatever you learn about him, whatever you learn of his attributes, whatever you learn of his salvation, Please don't let this be true of you, that you don't know himself.

Because this is eternal life. To know him. To know him personally. To know him individually as if nobody else was going to be saved but yourself.

To know him personally as if there was nobody else to come into union with him but yourself. To love him with such a love as if nobody else was to receive his love or give love to him as yourself.

[ 20 : 59 ] It is to be that personal and that individual. Even though you know there are multitudes that are the children of God with you. It still comes to the point where this is eternal life. To know thee. The only true God.

And if we do know him today. Are we burdened to know him better? Do we want to know him better so that we will love him more? Do we want to know? Do we want to pass from that zeal that is not according to knowledge into more of that zeal that is according to knowledge?

Do we lament our lack of zeal of Christians? It's there, it's obvious. It's obvious in me as a speaker, as I'm sure it is to yourself as hearers, in the day in which we live compared to other times and compared to other believers that we come across even in our day, we can say that we lack zeal for Christ.

Why do we lack zeal for Christ? What is at the bottom of that lack of zeal or love or whatever else it is? You can always and must always bring it back to this because this is the foundational aspect of him, knowing him.

If we truly knew him more than we do, more intimately, if we were burdened to know him better, then we would have much more of zeal and of love and of all these other qualities that the Bible describes as the characteristics of a Christian.

[ 22 : 39 ] This is eternal life. It's not just for the possession of it. It's for the exercise of it. It's for the commending of it. It's for the explanation even of it to others.

How can we go to people who are dead in trespasses and sins and tell them this is eternal life and point to something written if our own lives don't bathe from day to day this most marvelous illustration of eternal life to know God.

Do people point to us in the street? Do our neighbors speak of us? Whatever they say of us, do they say this of us? Whatever else they say, do they say, I know that he or she is a person that knows God.

Even if they have no time for God themselves, even if they don't believe, even in the existence of God, do they say about us, well, I don't agree with them for one moment, but I do admire this sincerity, the truthfulness, the honesty, with which they live out their convictions when they say that they know God.

This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God. Without knowing him, we might as well never have been born.

[ 24 : 02 ] Without knowing him, we have no shred of righteousness. Without knowing him, we will never have true satisfaction and happiness. Without knowing him, it is impossible to please him, because faith, while it is believing in Christ, it is that which unites us so as to know him.

You can never separate faith from knowledge. This is eternal life. Do you then know God? Let us put the question again to ourselves.

Is our relationship with God today one that knows him to the possession of eternal life? And if not, well, surely we should see to it before another day passes that we set our hearts upon knowing. But we do indeed believe the scriptures when they tell us that there is nothing in all the world to be compared to knowing God than Jesus Christ.

I do count and support, said Paul, but done what I need for him. For the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

[ 25 : 32 ] The excellency of the knowledge. But he emphasizes too that it's the knowledge of the only true God.

This is eternal life that they might know the only true God. Why does Jesus say this? What does it mean that he is saying the only true God?

Does it mean that Jesus himself is here acknowledging that he is not himself the only true God? What do you say to a Jehovah's Witness on your doorstep when they open the Bible here and say look, here is Jesus himself saying that God the Father, God Jehovah, is the only true God and therefore Jesus himself was saying, they will tell you, that he himself was not the true God.

How do you answer them? How do you answer them from this text? Well, in this way I hope. What the Lord is emphasizing is that there is only one true God.

God. That's the first point. He is contrasting this with all the gods that exist in the world that people have come to set up for themselves as gods, that were all around in his day as they are in our day.

[ 26 : 50 ] All the religions of the world that have idols, that have gods of some description. Jesus is emphasizing that there is only one God, there is only one who can take the name God to himself and that is this God, the God that we know through the scriptures.

But he is not saying that God the Father is the only one who is God. God. It's the position of the word only that is of crucial importance.

There is a great difference between saying that they might know thee the only true God and saying that they might know thee only the true God.

if you were to come to Jesus Christ and say you are the true God. You are the only true God.

That's very different to coming to him and saying you only are the true God. You can say and have to say about Jesus Christ as of the Father and of the Holy Spirit you are the only true God because there is only one God and all the attributes of God are in Jesus as they are in the Father as they are in the Holy Spirit and you can come to each of them and say you are the only true God but you cannot go to each of them and say you only are the true God.

[ 28 : 25 ] And that is what Jesus is emphasizing that this is eternal life to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

You can compare what he says in chapter 1 and verse 1 in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. That doesn't mean that the only one who was God was the Word although the Word was indeed God.

The Father is God the Spirit is God the Word Jesus the Son is God. You can say of each of them they are the only true God because there is only one God and they are God.

But you cannot say they only each of them only is the true God. And so you go to your Jehovah's Witness and you say well look at the second part of the text.

This is life eternal that they might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. We'll see in a minute how Jesus is actually embraced within this knowing that leads to eternal life that gives that is eternal life.

[ 29 : 37 ] How could it possibly be that God is the one whom we know and therefore have eternal life and then say and Jesus Christ if Jesus wasn't God.

Do we imagine that Jesus would have had this position in his own estimation if he were not conscious of being fully God. Would he have said this is eternal life to know the only true God and Jesus Christ if Jesus Christ was not himself also the only true God.

You see that is the essence of it. To know Christ is to know God. To know Christ is to have eternal life just as to know the Father is to have eternal life. This is eternal life.

And you go to your Jehovah's Witness and you tell them look this is not a denial of the deity of Christ it's the greatest affirmation of the deity of Christ. There isn't a text in the Bible more abundantly evident in affirming the deity of my Lord as this text which tells me that this is eternal life to know him because he too is the true God as is the Father.

We are the only true God. And then there's this word true. and it's one of John's great words that he uses both in his gospel and in his first epistle.

[ 31 : 04 ] And the meaning of the word in the use of it here in John in this use of it at least is not just as we often use it to contrast with the word false.

For the sake of time we can say that what John means by this word is something that contains the substance of the divine.

Something that contains the substance of the divine. That's what makes it true as against something else. Go again to chapter 1 and you'll see how he contrasts the John the Baptist with the word or with Christ himself as he was coming into the world.

You can see how the emphasis there in verse 6 of chapter 1 there was a man sent from God whose name was John the same came for a witness to bear witness of the light that all men through him might believe.

He was not that light but he was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

[ 32 : 12 ] And you would not say that John the Baptist was not true in the sense of being truthful or sincere but yet John is here saying John the Baptist was not that light.

That was the true light Jesus himself. Or go to chapter 6 where Jesus is speaking about the bread that came down from heaven where he emphasizes at verse 32 for example there where he said our fathers they said did eat manna in the desert as it was written he gave them bread from heaven to eat then Jesus said verily I say unto you Moses gave you not that bread from heaven but my father giveth you the true bread from heaven for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven I am the bread of life and so on.

He's not denying the fact that Jesus that Moses actually gave them bread from heaven that he gave it to them in a wonderful manner that God through Moses distributed manna to them but he says he did not give them that true bread because the manna was if you like a type of the true bread that's in himself that which is true in this sense that John uses the word is what has in itself the very substance of the divine and so he is saying this is eternal life that they might know thee the only true God not just the only God but the only true God however many gods men may invent they can never really be God because they can never have the substance of the divine they can never be true in this wonderful sense and eternal life can never be in anything other than the knowledge of the only true

God eternal life involves that that's why you find in 1st Thessalonians Paul saying this is what you did the entrance of the word that we had amongst you he says this was the kind of entrance you had that you turned from idols to serve the only true God to serve the living God and to wait for his son from heaven there's a wonderful text in 1st John chapter 5 and the last almost the last verse of it we know that the son of God has come and has given to us an understanding you see that we may know him that is true and we are in him that is true even in his son Jesus Christ this is the true God and eternal life and you know for a long time I was rather mystified as to why he actually then added little children keep yourselves from idols well isn't it obvious

I think it is now that we know something of the meaning of that word true having the substance of heaven we know he says him that is true and we are in him that is true even in his son this is the true God and eternal life little children keep yourselves from idols from everything that is not true in

the sense of divine don't give any worship to it keep yourself from it for this is the true God and this is eternal life to know him that brings us into the knowledge of Jesus Christ knowing him and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent we can only know God by Jesus Christ even in heaven our knowledge of God will be mediated by Jesus Christ we will only see God as we see

[ 36 : 22 ] Jesus Christ what a wonderful sight and knowledge that will be when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 then shall I know even as also I am Lord but as we said it is inclusive of Jesus himself this is eternal life to know Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent now just for brevity's sake because we're going to look at knowing Jesus Christ personally in other studies God willing but just as we had to ask the question which God do we need to come to know so we have to ask the question also which Christ is it we come to know because Jesus himself taught that there will arise false Christ and false prophets Luke chapter 21 and verse 80 he said go ye not after them days are coming when if it were possible he said even they might deceive the very elect go ye not after them which

Christ this Christ Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent that is the crucial point the Jesus that God sent not the Jesus that people imagine for themselves he should have sent not the Jesus that people for themselves invent for convenience sake dismissing or taking away from or adding to the Christ of the Bible Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent my friends it is so important that we ask ourselves who is the Jesus that I know and I think I know is it the Jesus whom God sent is it Jesus in the attributes that are his that we find in the scriptures is it Jesus sent from God to deal with sin is it Jesus the substitute for me in my sins is it Jesus the representative with God is it Jesus the only mediator between God and men is it

Jesus in all the facets of his being his work his natures his person that are revealed to us in scripture is it indeed Jesus truly who died and Jesus who truly rose again from the dead this is eternal life to know Jesus Christ whom thou hast saved sent Jesus as Jesus Christ and it's significant that it's in this context that he should say of himself this is eternal life to know Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent because it is the complete Jesus and none other but this Jesus that is the way the truth of life no man who comes to the fire but by me do we then know him as we begin this series of studies do we indeed know this

Jesus Christ for ourselves are we in a living relationship with him every day have we confessed our sins to him do we love him as our saviour isn't he saying to us that this is the whole emphasis of scripture that we might come to know him whom to know is life eternal you remember the famous chapter in Matthew 11 where he so strongly denounced as we preached from not so long ago the cities in which he had done his greatest works Bethsaida Chorazin Capernaum warn to you all he said because they knew so much about him but they didn't come to know him yet yet that is the chapter 2 that says no man knows the son but the father neither knows any man the father save the son and he to whomsoever the son will reveal you see there is the knowledge of God through the son out coming to know

God and that's why he then adds come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke on you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest unto your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light there is the crux of the life a famous preacher on his deathbed I forget to know who it was but this is what he said all my learning is of no use to me now I must know God himself and him only that is the difference Jesus is saying there you can know all there is to know about me without taking my yoke upon and all the learning in the world while it may be very good and we're not we're emphasizing in any way depreciating or deprecating that learning we must be committed to it but all the learning in the world by itself will not give you peace of soul come he says unto me and I will give you rest this is life to know him to be at rest in him is new soul today but rest in knowing

[ 42 : 53 ] God we come to thee today to magnify thee for all the ways in which thou hast made thyself known to us we praise thee above all things oh lord our God for that revelation that thou hast given us in the person of thy son we thank thee for him that is true that is the exact representation to us of thyself for we know that he said that whoever knew him knew the father and we thank thee lord for the way that thou dost invite us into that knowledge today so that we may have in ourselves the possession of eternal life we pray that thy spirit may bless thy word to us and that we too may know for ourselves that we have that eternal life when we have that knowledge of thee and of

Jesus Christ whom thou did send bless it to us then we pray part us now with that blessing and accept us for giving all our sin in his name and for his sake amen