

That Ye May Know

*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may **know** that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we **know** that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we **know** that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We **know** that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we **know** that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we **know** that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, 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. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. (1 John 5:13-21)*

Introduction:

Our reading today was, as you will have realised from John's first epistle. This is an amazing epistle by virtue of the fact that it is packed with so many profound truths. One, if the most important thing to remember when we read this epistle is that John's is an eye witness account; having spent three years with our Lord as he points this out in verse 1 of this epistle. He speaks of that which was in the beginning: Remembering, in the gospel of John we read: "*In the beginning was the Word*".

[He says in his epistle]

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (1 John 1:1)

The title of today's message is: "That ye may know".

The word "know" is such a powerful word especially for us as believers and within these 9 verses we see the word "know" no less than seven times. In saying that this epistle is packed with so much truth we are forced then to define both knowledge and truth.

We make the pre-supposition that knowledge equates to truth (or at the very least, believing something to be true) and that as believers we regard truth as absolute; more specifically God's truth as defined in the bible.

We have a branch of study called epistemology dealing with knowledge; or more particularly, how we know or how we know that we know. [This is where we get the word epistle from.]

As believers our first consideration is that God is a God of knowledge. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable that he would communicate this to us (**in words**) especially given that we were created in his image; for relationship with him and that relationship requires the exchange of information.

We must also accept that this relationship is broken due to sin.

As believers we accept that God is the starting point of all knowledge; and mankind cannot know anything of or within himself; it is just not possible. The beginning of true knowledge is the fear of God and therefore it is in relationship with him that knowledge is revealed to us. That relationship of course, begins when a person is born again. "unless a man is born again", he cannot see the kingdom of God"; this is the opening of a person's spiritual eyes and it is only then that God can **fully** reveal things to him according to what we refer to as special revelation. (particularly his word). *"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit.... neither can he **know** them because they are spiritually discerned"*.

The realization that the God of the universe has communicated his word to us and that it is able to be received by us, is nothing short of amazing. In this passage the Lord wants us to know 5 things.

1.The Certainty of Knowing

*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may **know** that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13)*

John begins the last verses of his epistle with the words: "These things": What things you may ask; simply all that came before this point. Now he builds as it were to a crescendo in these last 9 verses; summarizing and condensing in many respects the entire epistle.

In the previous verse he states it quite plainly:

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (1 John 5:12) [Nineteen words which clearly state the gospel]

John confirms their faith in The Lord Jesus; we already know from John's gospel that whosoever believeth on the only begotten Son of God should not perish but have everlasting life.

In many respects John is restating the words of Jesus himself: *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* (John 3:18)

John's epistle is quite the complete apologetic and besides John's gospel and Romans it is a useful book in leading a person to Christ.

Why?

Because it tells us of the importance of truth; and that God is truth (light).

Because it tells the sinner of his sinful state before God (1 John 1:8-10)

Because tells us that God is able to forgive sin.

Because tells us that this forgiveness is through Christ's blood and that he has been made a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

Because it affirms to the sinner that he must be born again (born of God)

Because it enables a person to truly examine himself and discern if he is genuinely born again according to the transformed life experienced by a convert.

Because it confirms the witness of who Christ is and that Christ is who he said he is (God manifest in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity): "These three are one".

And so, this salvation through faith in Christ is declared as a certainty to them: that is to say not only to believe on the Lord but also to know that in doing so that they have eternal life because of who Jesus is and the finished work of salvation that he wrought.

Remember as I said before, John's is an eye-witness account which is important in establishing truth. It is also worth noting that as an eye-witness the disciples had nothing to gain for their witness of Christ; it was quite the opposite, they suffered persecution. John, himself, spent time in exile on the isle of Patmos.

This confirmation as a first-hand eye witness was important especially in view of the heresies and persecutions which the early believers were exposed to. Both John's gospel and his epistles focus on the importance of truth. In John's gospel we read that Jesus is the truth.

And so: the first truth in this passage that the Lord wants us to know is that through faith in Christ, we have eternal life.

Application:

[Turn to]

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

There is nothing more precious than the assurance of our salvation and the foundation of our faith in the Lord Jesus; Satan loves nothing more than to undermine this and put doubt in our minds. This is why it is so important for the Christian to be in complete armour and especially the helmet of salvation. Paul expounds on this in 1 Thessalonians.

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

Nevertheless, doubt can be good if it leads to a positive confession of Christ as Saviour [we are instructed to examine ourselves] but for those whose salvation has already been secured it is most destructive; it destroys our testimony and our witness for Christ (for one thing). In other words, it prevents us from living for him. A powerless believer is a silent believer. On the other hand, the opposite should be true: let the redeemed of the Lord say so. We believe and therefore speak.

[We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; (2 Corinthians 4:13)]

One of the greatest statements I have heard in recent times when it comes to our confession of our faith, is from Francis Schaeffer: He said: "If anybody asks me why I believe in Christianity, I tell them because it is true". Of course, this doesn't replace having a proper apologetic but it is a good place to start. Nevertheless, any way you look at the Christian faith we know that it is true: Historically, Scientifically, Philosophically, Metaphysically and Spiritually.

We ought to be as confident as Francis Schaeffer and indeed be able to declare out loud: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth".

The greatest confirmation that we can have within ourselves, is to read our bibles and to daily make his word a reality in our lives: To live is Christ.

2. The Confidence of Knowing

*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we **know** that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we **know** that we have the petitions that we desired of him. 1 John 5:14-15*

Knowing that the Lord hears the prayers of the believer obviously gives him confidence. This confidence stems from the fact that we have come to know and believe in Christ and that the God of heaven actually exists.

As we read in Hebrews:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

In Matthew (and Luke also), the Lord gives us model prayer and reminds the disciples firstly to refrain from "wordy" prayers (like the heathen) and secondly, he gives us an indication of the will of God in respect to having our prayers answered.

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:7-13)

It is quite interesting and a blessing (I might say) as you look through scripture, the simplicity of pray. Admittedly there are some quite eloquent prayers; but at the same time there is a simplicity.

If we look at Jehoshaphat's prayer in 2 Chronicles

[Turn to]

O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee. (2 Chronicles 20:12)

At the end of a rather lengthy and eloquent prayer, Jehoshaphat basically says, "Lord, we don't know what to do but our eyes are on you".

That really is the essence of prayer.

Application:

Our challenge really; is to know the will of God and to pray accordingly. James' epistle refines this for us.

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:2-3)

In these verses we see that a polluted prayer life completely messes you up. Firstly, unmet desires lead to hatred. [We read here "kill" and though I don't believe it is possible for a believer to actually kill, the Lord equates hatred and anger with having committed murder in your heart]. Secondly, we have no chance of receiving from God when we do not commit our requests to the Lord in prayer. Thirdly when our prayers aren't answered, it is because we haven't prayed according to God's will.

So:

How should we be praying and what should we be praying for?

- Our prayers should always acknowledge who God is: "Our Father in heaven"
- We should pray that his will be done and not ours; study to know God's will.
- Pray for wisdom, this prayer will always be answered.
- We should pray for our simple needs "our daily bread" before extravagant ones.
- We should pray for forgiveness; confess our sins and ask the Lord to search our hearts to convict us of any failing. We know that if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear our prayers and so this is important.
- At the same time, we should ask God to forgive others.
- We should pray for friends and relatives, our country and political leaders.

In short, our prayer life is an extension of our love for the Lord and David sums it up quite succinctly:

*I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.
(Psalms 116:1)*

The second thing the Lord wants us to know is that he answers prayer.

3. The Circumstances of Knowing

*If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, **and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.** There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We **know** that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*
(1 John 5:16-18)

To be honest, it would be so much easier to skip these 3 verses; they are challenging to say the least. Nevertheless, there are some important truths and doctrines which we take from them. These concern the circumstances of knowing when and how to pray.

This passage raises quite a few questions; not the least of which is "a sin which leads to death".

We must ask ourselves:

1. By brother do we assume believer or does it refer to the brotherhood of all mankind?
2. Why not pray for your brother?
3. What is the exact nature of the prayer? Is it for forgiveness? Is it for God to restrain or deliver them from such a sin?
4. The specific sin (if indeed it is one specific sin)?
5. Why or how does this particular sin lead to death?
6. Is death physical or spiritual?

In these verses John tells us the seriousness of a particular sin and thus the circumstances of knowing when (and more importantly how) to pray and when not to pray for our brothers.

If we take the view that "brother" refers generally to all mankind then we adjust our thinking and therefore the way we pray accordingly. Ultimately our prayer for an unbeliever is for his salvation and it is impossible for the Lord to overlook unbelief. For the believer our prayer is for his sanctification.

The end result is that we pray or ask and the individual for whom we pray is given life rather than death. Life itself is attained through the forgiveness of sins and more particularly through believing on Christ.

I think this is a key point to this portion of the scripture. We cannot pray that God forgives unbelief but rather that a person's heart would be softened to believe the gospel.

At the heart of all our prayers we are asking the Lord to intervene in the lives of others.

In regard to death, we know the wages of **all** sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Again James expounds this:

[Turn to]

"...But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death". James 1:13-15

Death; both spiritual and physical is the end result of sin. For the unbeliever it is both physical and spiritual. For the believer, it can only be physical and there may be occasions whereby the Lord appoints an untimely death because of sin. We saw what happened to Ananias and Saphira. And we also saw what happened to the members of the church of Corinth, *"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep, (1Cor 11:30)"*.

In Jeremiah we see a particular precedence where The Lord gives the command not to pray.

"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee". Jeremiah 7:16

In this particular case, it was idolatry and unbelief among other things which prompted The Lord to pronounce this judgement.

Under-pining all of this [this is vitally important], John tells us that the born-again believer is not in a pattern of continual sin (he sinneth not: the inflected ending tells us this). Instead, he keeps or guards himself against temptation or sin and therefore Satan does not "touch him". We know from Romans those that are born again are his and those that are not are "none of his". For this reason, the unbeliever is under the dominion of Satan, whilst the believer is under the protection of God.

It is also worth pointing out here, that the Holy Spirit restrains the believer from certain sins and there are others that clearly a believer can commit even though they might seem and are particularly heinous. For example, we see cases of fornication and adultery in the New Testament.

Obviously these sins under the new covenant aren't dealt with in the same manner. What we do see in the New Testament is the case of a man in an adulterous relationship with his step-mother (1Corinthians 5:1). In this instance the man concerned was "put out" of the church until he repented.

If we take the view that there is a specific sin that leads to death; then under the Law; certain sins were punishable by physical death. This may or may not be helpful to our discussion. We know that breaking the Sabbath was punishable by death as was idolatry, adultery, murder, incest, cross-dressing; and there are probably a few more (time has not permitted me to exhaust the list).

We see even in modern society (in times past), certain crimes received the death penalty.

If we take the view that it may not be one specific sin [I tend to believe this because he says a sin and not the sin], then there are occasions whereby it is wiser to let the Lord deal with people rather than to pray for them. John is outlining the circumstances for this. He is adamant that there are occasions to pray and occasions not to pray. This is profitable for us to know, first and foremost.

Application:

Where does that leave us then?

Firstly, we are not without knowledge. It is possible to examine a person's life to a certain degree (though the Lord only knows) and discern whether that person is a believer or not. In this case we are able to pray accordingly.

Therefore, our focus must be on the prayers that we should pray rather than those which John says " *I do not say that he shall pray for it*".

If you remember at the beginning of this discussion, I spoke about prayers of forgiveness. I would like to draw your attention to these two prayers.

We are well familiar with the prayer which the Lord prayed from the cross.

*Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...***

(Luke 23:34)

Similarly Stephen the martyr prays:

"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". (Acts 7:60)

Prior to his resurrection the Lord gives this charge to his disciples.

"Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." John 20:23

In view of this, we are in a position of power and also privilege when it comes to releasing people from offences that have been committed directly against us.

4. The Clarity of Knowing

*And we **know** that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we **know** that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, 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. (1 John 5:19-20)*

Four of the seven "knows" are here in verses 18 - 20 and they are combined with 3 "trues".

We are to know that we are of God and in him; not of the wicked one. We are in the world and not of the world.

How do we know all this; because he hath given us an understanding? And how has he given us understanding?

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. (1 John 2:20)

This is the clarity of knowing.

We also see in Romans:

*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:
(Romans 8:16)*

In looking at these verses we're not surprised that much of John's gospel is given further light in this epistle and when you look at them in conjunction with each other, what glorious light it is.

As Jesus himself says:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

Application:

Again, John makes this distinction when he says that we are of God and not of the world which lies in evil. Do we need anything more in the way of discouragement when we are told not to love the world, neither the things which are in the world? Afterall, love for the world is enmity with God; how can we love God and evil at the same time. We cannot serve two masters.

The stark distinction he makes is just as stark as the distinction between darkness and light itself. For the believer it is the acceptance of God's word as truth that makes that separation between darkness and light. When "the lights come on" (so to speak); it's amazing just how much understanding we receive. It is important therefore to continue to walk in that light; this is the basis of true fellowship.

If there is anything to be gained from this, it is the importance of living "a separated life". The word for church comes from the Greek "Ekklesia" which means an assembly but also has the connotation of being "called out from among".

Another consideration is this:

As blessed as this understanding is to us, there is a greater purpose than to "bask in it". Jesus clearly tells us that we are to be lights in a dark world and we are to share that light and not hide it under a bushel.

Remember that this revelation of who God is did not come from ourselves; no amount of pondering or navel gazing could possibly reveal his true and glorious nature. It was only through his grace that this knowledge was revealed to our hearts.

5. The Conviction of Knowing

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. 1 John 5:21

Given everything that preceded this verse and everything that the Lord expects us to know; John gives a charge to the reader to abstain from idolatry. This makes sense given that the 1st century world was not only deeply pagan but desperately wicked.

We see this in Paul's address to the Athenians in Acts 17. He makes the comment that the city was wholly given to idolatry.

[Turn to]

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. (Acts 17:16)

Furthermore, he states that he perceives that the people were too superstitious. He then proceeds with his well-known oratory in declaring "the Unknown God" and expounding the true and living God.

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (Acts 17:22-23)

Superstition is typical of those caught in idolatry; remember as believers we have not been given a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. It is the blood of Jesus which cleanses us from an evil conscience.

The obvious issue in attaching yourself to idols is their very nature:

In warning the Corinthian Church to flee from idols Paul writes:

[Turn to]

Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:14-16)

And:

What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. (1 Corinthians 10:19-21)

What Paul is saying here is that the object itself is nothing; it holds no intrinsic power. It is the spirit behind the object that has the power to deceive. The god of this world [Satan] blinds the eyes of the unbeliever.

To be a partaker of the cup of the Lord (the Lord's Supper), is to acknowledge and to identify with the Lord Jesus and his vicarious death as the atonement for sin. Jesus himself says that you cannot serve two masters; you will hate the one and love the other.

On the other hand, the cup of devils and fellowship therewith is to indulge in practices to which they are associated with. These included all kinds of immorality; sexual and otherwise.

We need to realize that any form of idolatry severely affects our relationship with the Lord and also other believers. Note the word communion is a combination of two words: common union. We have a common union with Christ and each other; we are the body of Christ.

Application

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. (Acts 17:16)

The notion of idolatry might seem peculiar to us in our so-called modern society but is the world really any different than it was in Paul's day; I say not. This being the case there are two things we ought to be doing as believers.

1. Keep ourselves from idols.

If the charge to keep ourselves from idols was an easy one then there would be no need to warn the believer.

Idolatry can manifest in the contemporary believer's life in many ways. The entanglement of idolatry is a subtle one; even as the deceitfulness of sin which so easily besets or entangles us.

Our present world is no less wicked and there is definitely a sense of the days getting darker. We only need to watch the television for an hour or so; and especially the advertising which seeks to distract and to allure the minds of the viewer to believe in another reality.

It's as simple as this: any departure from the truth of God's word can lead to idolatry. Given that we are to serve God and not sin, then anything that takes the rightful place of God in our lives must be classified as idolatry.

Paul presents a specific issue in two of his epistles: another gospel and another Jesus. Both of these cases amount to idolatry.

You can't separate Jesus from the gospel or the gospel from Jesus. The gospel itself is defined as the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost.

We have good reason to keep ourselves from idols, knowing that we become like that which we worship.

[Turn to]

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. (Psalms 115:4-8)

If you want to be deaf, dumb, blind, immobile and unfeeling, [and I mean this in a spiritual sense of course] then follow after idols.

We know the Lord's purpose for our lives and that is to be conformed to the image of Christ and this is achieved through the process of sanctification. Our sanctification as believers is in jeopardy if we devote ourselves to things which compete with our love for the Lord.

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: who or what are we given or giving to? As I have said; these can be quite subtle. Stubbornness is described as the sin of idolatry in 1 Samuel and so the sin of intellectual self-worship would fit into this category. Stubbornness is a brother of pride and is the opposite of humility. This is just ONE example.

The **simple** remedy for idolatry is to know God and read his word daily.

2. The second thing we need to consider as believers is this. If the city and indeed the entire world is wholly given to idolatry, then we ought to do as Paul did.

He was stirred in his spirit and he went to the synagogue and he went to the market palace and preached the gospel. The love of God constrained him such that he was compelled to share the truth regardless of the cost. We need to have that same compassion.

Conclusion

I began this message with the idea or concept of knowledge and truth. The greatest knowledge or truth that we can know is that God is; he exists, he seeks to have a relationship with you and that he is a rewarder of those that seek him diligently.

In terms of this relationship we see something very particular about the structure of these verses, which I did not mention before but which helps to link each of the verses in the passage together.

Firstly we see our relationship with the Lord through faith in Christ, then our relationship with our brethren, then our relationship with the world and finally our relationship to the spiritual realm (idols).

It is interesting also that we see a separation or a distinction that enables us to know or distinguish between: the believer and the unbeliever, the world and the kingdom of God and Christ and idols.

We see that:

Salvation is through faith in Christ alone.

He hears the prayers of the faithful.

A believer sinneth not and keeps himself and wicked one “toucheth” him not.

Christ is the true and living God.

This world is evil and is given to idolatry.

As believers, this is important because the Lord has told us these things:

That ye might know!!

Let us pray