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## JOHN 17:3 : THE ESSENCE OF ETERNAL LIFE [2]

No. EE32

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Last time we tried to come to grips with what it means to know God. It is, however, one thing to define it; it is quite something else to experience it. Let us then consider a number of pointers or guidelines to help us forward on this road of the highest of human callings.

### 1. I must realise that I have no greater calling than the pursuit of the knowledge of God.

Micah 6:8: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (remember our emphasis last time on the personal relationship with God).

Phil 3:8-10: "... I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... I want to know Christ ..."

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever" (Q&A 1).

### 2. Let me embrace this fact with both arms: *It is God's will to reveal Himself to me and walk in fellowship with me.*

This is what lies at the heart of His promises for the New Covenant (Hos 2:18-19; Jer 31:31-34). This is what it is all about: that we shall be His people and that He shall be our God.

### 3. My focus must be God personally - in other words, the Giver and not the gifts!

Can there be a greater insult than to show an

interest in somebody only for what you can get out of him?

### 4. God can only be known in and through Christ.

This is vital! It can never be overemphasised!

The incarnate Word is God's supreme, perfect and final revelation to us (Jn 1:14; 14:8-9). It is impossible to have a proper knowledge of God without looking continuously and intensely at our Lord Jesus Christ. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." (Hb 1:3). Christ is the clearest window through whom we see who God really is (2Cor 4:6).

Moreover, Christ is the one and only Mediator between God and man. Without Him there is no fellowship with God (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1Tm 2:5).

### 5. This revelation comes to us through the Word and the Spirit.

It is so that God's eternal power and deity is evident from nature - His general revelation (Rm 1:20). But this is not sufficient to lead us to a saving and personal knowledge of God. For this we are dependant on His special self-revelation in Christ - as recorded in the Bible. Without the Word we can never know the living God as we should.

This does not mean that I need simply to study the Bible as I would any other book. God's revelation, especially the deep truths of the New Covenant, remains hidden unless we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit. The responsibility to seek the knowledge of God is mine, but I will only make any progress if I do so in prayerful dependence on the Spirit's work (1Cor 2:6-16).

### 6. Without regular, disciplined and persistent prayer we will not progress one millimetre along this road of the highest calling.

It is after all in prayer that we experience the most intimate fellowship with God.

Question and answer 116 of the Heidelberg Catechism puts it like this: *Why is prayer necessary*

for Christians? Because it is the chief part of the thankfulness which God requires of us, and because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with hearty sighing unceasingly beg them of Him and thank Him for them.

### 7. The knowledge of God will always bring about a measure of emotional experience.

Can there ever be a love relationship without emotion? But here too the norm for all genuine Christian experience applies: *it can only be trusted as authentic if it is rooted in Biblical truth.*

### 8. God reveals Himself only to a faith that is childlike and utterly dependant.

Never are we more dependant, and never do we need more faith than when we concern ourselves with His self-revelation. Augustine said, "If you do not believe, you will not understand". It is as simple as that. The old Puritan Thomas Watson said, "Faith is the main artery of the soul".

In this connection Hb 11:6 is of the utmost importance: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (NASB). Man can accomplish much without faith, but nothing that will please God.

Without faith there can be no salvation. But more than that, faith lies at the heart of our daily walk with the Lord. By faith the unseen becomes visible, the inconceivable becomes possible. Faith is the hand with which I take hold of His gifts.

### 9. God reveals Himself only to the humble.

Do not expect to progress in the knowledge of God if you are a proud and choosy know-all. That is why the Lord Jesus says in Mt 11:25-27: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure ... No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses

to reveal him."

### **10. The knowledge of God is not for casual and double-minded seekers.**

The knowledge of God is something to which we must "press on" in a resolute, disciplined and persistent manner (Hos 6:3). "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).

All the men and women of God throughout the ages, in Biblical times and thereafter, have pursued the knowledge of God with a holy hunger.

This was the case with Moses. Exodus 32-34 make for thrilling reading! Already in 33:11 we read that God spoke to Moses "face to face as a man speaks with his friend". Then Moses comes to a full realisation of the seriousness of his calling to lead his people and he prays, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you" (13).

To this God then replies, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name" (17).

But, while Moses is duly thankful that the Lord has granted his request, he is afraid that he may merely have received the ability to know God's ways and to lead the people correctly. Wonderful as this is, there is something that he desires above all else, something without which he cannot live and which he is afraid God will stop short of. What holy boldness he has: "Now show me your glory" (18)!

God responds positively, but not without qualification: yes, He will pass before Moses in all His majesty, but Moses must realise that there are limits. No-one may see God in all His glory and live. Therefore He will cover his servant with His own hand in the cleft of a rock until He has passed by. He will then take away His hand so that Moses may see His back (19-23).

The fulfilment we find in Ex 34:5-7: "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD,

the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation".

Afterwards, when Moses begged the Lord to remain Israel's God, in spite of their sinfulness, He renewed the covenant with them (10).

Nothing pleases the Lord more than a desire such as the one expressed by Moses. And if we persist in our prayers, the Holy Spirit will increase our capacity to know Him, intensify our longing for Him, and fulfil our desires more and more.

### **11. Those who are zealous to live a holy life and serve Him in loving devotion, are the ones who progress in the knowledge of God.**

Man was created in God's image. That image was seriously marred by the Fall. But this is being restored as part of the redeeming work of Christ. Those of us who are united to Christ are being transformed into His likeness (Eph 4:23-24; Col 3:10). That is why we are commanded to be holy as God is holy (1Pt 1:15-16), and to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48).

It stands to reason that not all of God's attributes will be reflected in man. Some, however, can come to expression, such as His goodness, mercy and love. And we will be able to develop these traits to the extent that we learn to recognise, admire and worship them in Him.

In this connection the promise of the Lord Jesus in Jn 14:21-23 is of the utmost importance: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him ... If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

### **12. The knowledge of God is for those who have**

### **worshipping hearts.**

God created and re-created us so that we may worship and glorify Him. This is one of the reasons why the Holy Spirit wants to lead us into an ever deepening knowledge of God. But worship is not only the fruit of this knowledge, it is also a root of it. Why would the Spirit lead us ever higher if we do not show our gratitude and awe by richer worship? Truly, worship and the knowledge of God always walk hand in hand.

### **13. Those who are serious about the knowledge of God must be content to receive not only good things from Him, but also His discipline (Hb 12).**

We come to the knowledge of God not so much on the peaks as in the valleys. We know this not only from the lives of the saints through the ages, but from personal experience.

### **14. Last but not least, I myself have to walk the mountain track to the peaks of the knowledge of God.**

Of course it will help to link arms with my brothers and sisters who have the same passion burning in their hearts. True Christian experience is often corporate by nature. But in the final analysis everybody must carry his or her own pack. There are in any case long stretches of the climb where the ledges can only be negotiated by one person at a time - and increasingly so the higher we progress.

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