Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Evaluating Your Relationship to Christ, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-66

Let's open our Bibles for our time tonight as we look together for a few minutes at the Word of God to Philippians chapter 3 where we looked this morning, discussing the surpassing value of knowing Christ. We talked about the fact that it is basic and essential, it's the very heart of our Christian faith to concentrate on the relationship we have with Christ. We heard that certainly tonight in the baptisms as those dear folks shared with us their desire to know Christ in a personal way.

Paul has that in his heart as he writes this great section from chapter 3 verse 4 down through verse 16. As he comes into verse 12, the text that we're going to look at tonight having already looked at verses 4 through 11 this morning, his thoughts to turn to the athletic world. Certainly not unfamiliar to all of us who have been bombarded and assaulted hour upon hour recently with the Olympics from Barcelona. Paul saw in the athletic world many spiritual analogies and frequently used them.

The favorite of his spiritual analogies had to do with runners. The underlying figure of a runner is in his mind as he writes in verse 12. "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself has having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore as many as are perfect have this attitude. And if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you. However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained."

The athletic metaphor is obviously in verse 14 crystallized. He sees a goal. Attaining that goal will yield a prize and demands the effort which he describes as pressing on toward that goal. He sees himself then as a runner.

Now back in verses 4 through 6, you remember he discussed the worthless things, that things that he once pursued which were now considered to him to be rubbish. And then in verses 7 through 11 as we saw this morning, he moved through from the worthless things to the worthy one. And now we could say he moves to the worthwhile goal in verses 12 to 16. And now that Christ has been established as the worthy one for whom He will gladly count everything he possesses as loss, he is saying to us in verse 12, "This then becomes the pursuit of my life."

As we noted this morning when Paul came to salvation, it was because Jesus Christ became so attractive to him. It was because he saw in Christ the pearl of great price, he saw in Christ the treasure which has no equal. He saw the wonder and the glory and the majesty and the beauty of Christ. Christ became singularly attractive to him. He was drawn to Christ to the degree that he was willing to set aside all of the other worthless things to pursue only Christ. And now that he knows Christ, now that he has come into what he calls in verse 8 the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, he wants to know Him even more, as he notes in verse 10, and the pursuit of that knowledge is what he's talking about in verses 12 to 16. He is pursuing the prize and the prize is the passionate drive of his life.

To compare another passage that gives us a similar insight, look at 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Verses 24 to 27 are familiar to us and I read them because they give us a parallel insight also with athletic metaphors. First Corinthians 9:24 says, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run? But only one receives the prize. Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things, they then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way as not without aim, I box in such a way as not beating the air. But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly after I have preached to others I myself should be disqualified."

Here again is the Apostle Paul saying I'm involved in a race. And I pursue that race with everything I have. I run to win. I exercise self-control. I buffet my body to bring it into subjection, to make it my slave so that I don't become disqualified. I do this because there is a prize, there is an imperishable and eternal reward.

Now it's the same attitude of heart with Paul that we see here in Philippians chapter 3. The Christian life for him was a permanent pursuit. And it involved knowing Christ...ever more and more entering into the deep personal knowledge of Christ. You remember this morning we said that when he had come to salvation in gaining Christ, the pearl and the treasure, he had gained righteousness, power, fellowship and glory. In that fellowship was a triumphant approach to suffering, the patience and endurance of Christ Himself. So he had gained those things which is so most cherished. He had gained righteousness or holiness, acceptance before God. He had gained power over sin, Satan, the flesh. He had gained triumphant attitudes, triumphant spirit, endurance and patience in the midst of every difficulty. And he had gained eternal glory to be enjoyed someday in the presence of His Lord.

Now even though he had gained righteousness and power and endurance and glory, and it all came to him at his salvation, it does not mean that he had been perfected. It does not mean that he had somehow arrived at perfection just in being saved. And he says that in verse 12, "Not that I have already obtained, or have already become perfect. Yes I have entered into the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, and yes in Him I have found righteousness, power, patience, endurance and glory, but there is yet something to pursue." And so he gives in verse 12 what is

really a disclaimer and says, "Having had all these things, knowing Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, attaining to the resurrection from the dead someday and entering into eternal glory, with all of that I still have not already obtained the prize, nor have I already become perfect." But, I press on...I press on.

And sadly, as I noted for you this morning, I think there are many Christians who having become saved, having become redeemed, having become regenerated, having been declared righteous before God think that everything sort of comes to an end. Paul quickly begins his disclaimer and says...not at all, your salvation was only a beginning of a pursuit that will go on all your life long.

Peter must have had this pursuit in mind in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 18 when he said to those to whom he wrote, "But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Get to know Him better and better, more deeply, that's the pursuit of your life.

Now as we look at verses 12 to 16, it unfolds for us somewhat directly and simply. And Paul gives us essential principles to pursue the knowledge of Christ, the deep and abiding intimate knowledge of Christ which should be the pursuit of every Christian. If you're going to run the spiritual race to win, if you're going to run the spiritual race to obtain the prize, here are the principles that you must apply.

Number one, and this is an obvious one, there must be an awareness of the need to pursue the prize. That's obvious. In verse 12 he says, "Not that I have already obtained or have already become perfect..." He says my position before God has been altered, changed. I stand before God in the righteousness of Christ. My position, my state before God has changed. But my condition still has a long way to go. And so you begin this pursuit of knowing Christ by being aware that such a pursuit is necessary.

You might be interested to know that when Paul wrote this he had been a Christian for about 30 years. And when he says I have not already obtained and I am not already perfect, he is speaking as a man who for three decades had been pursuing the knowledge of Christ and he still wasn't there. Three decades of the most intense, loyal, dedicated, faithful pursuit of knowing Christ and he still was not spiritually satisfied, but spiritually dissatisfied. He was not perfect. He had not attained the full knowledge of Christ. He had not in attaining that become like Christ, the pursuit was still on. And in fact, anybody who is a Christian will discover in their own Christian experience that the longer you pursue the deep knowledge of Christ, the more elusive it becomes because the more you know about Him the more you know there is to know about Him that you don't know. And it's like running after something that keeps moving further away from you. And so there is a continually increasing spiritual pursuit matched by a continuingly increasing dissatisfaction.

Spiritual growth begins with a basic discontent with your present condition. If, for example, you believe you're everything you ought to be, you're in deep trouble because you're not going to pursue

the way Paul did. If you believe you have attained to the knowledge of God and you have attained to the righteousness of God in Christ and you have received the resurrection power of Christ and you have entered into the fellowship of His sufferings so that you have at your disposal His patience and endurance, and if you believe that you have attained unto eternal glory and it's all there for you and you already have it, then you're not going to go anywhere. And so, in teaching the Word of God it's very important for us to emphasize what does happen at salvation, but it's equally important for us to emphasize what must happen after salvation.

Pursuit then of knowing Christ begins with an honest assessment of my imperfection. I find myself in my own personal life saying very often in the quietness of my own heart, when I look at my life and it falls short of my own expectations and surely God's expectations, saying to myself I must know Christ more deeply, I must love Him more faithfully, I must be more like Him. There should be in the life of every Christian a basic discontent. If you want a word for it, the word is humility...the word is humility. It is the sense of failure, of falling short. That's where the pursuit begins when I realize there has to be one because I'm not where I should be.

There's a second principle, and this too is a very basic one. Paul says not only do I have to start with the recognition of the need to pursue the prize, but secondly, I have to make the maximum effort to pursue the prize. In the second half of verse 12 he says, "I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." This is a fascinating statement.

When I was saved it was not just to accomplish what happened at my salvation, but to put me in place to pursue another goal. There was something else in the mind of God. Verse 12 says I was saved in order to press on to lay hold of something which I don't know have but was the purpose by which...for which God laid hold of me. In other words, I wasn't complete in my salvation, God has something else. And so he says in verse 12, "I press on," dioko, I chase, I pursue. What? The very thing for which I was saved, the very thing for which God in Christ chased me."

God had a purpose in saving me and that should become my purpose now that I'm saved. And what is that purpose? In Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4 we read this, "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him, in love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will to the praise of the glory of His grace."

What Paul is saying there is we were saved to be holy. We were saved to become blameless. We were saved to become to the praise of the glory of His grace. Down in verse 12 he says the reason again that we were saved is that we should be to the praise of His glory.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, look at verse 13. "But we should always gives thanks to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through

sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth and it was for this He called you through our gospel," listen to this, "that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In other words, you were saved to become like Christ. You were saved to be conformed to the image of His Son. In the terms of Ephesians 4, you were saved that collectively with other believers you might become fully conformed to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

And so, when I look at my salvation I understand that that's a starting point and I must from that point on make the maximum effort to pursue the prize. And the prize is the deep personal knowledge of Christ that results in my being like Him.

There's a third principle that comes out of this and they overlap, and there are even somewhat repetitious. But it's so very important to Paul that he wants us to understand it from every facet. The third principle comes in verse 13, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do, one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on."

Let's say that the third principle is singlemindedness in pursuing the prize. One, to recognize I need to pursue it. Two, to make the maximum effort in that pursuit. And three, to be singleminded, or to focus my concentration on that. And that's very clear in verse 13, "But one thing I do..." I love that kind of narrow focus. I am consumed in my life with one thing.

You know, I would daresay that it's probably fairly obvious today that most people couldn't say that. They might rather say, "One hundred things I do, but not one thing...not one thing."

You remember in Nehemiah chapter 6 verse 1, "It came about when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah to Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall...Nehemiah says...and that no breach remained in it although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates that Sanballat and Geshem...you remember who were trying to hinder the work...sent a message to me saying, Come let us meet together at Chephorim(?) in the plain of Ono. They were planning to harm me. So I sent messengers to them, this is what I said, I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" That's the singlemindedness that is necessary in the spiritual life. If you can be distracted and sucked off by all of the spiritual Sanballats and Tobiahs that are going to come across your path, you're going to have a hard time being focused.

James put it this way, "A double-minded man is...what?...unstable in all his ways." He has a divided allegiance.

Now this kind of focused concentration demands two things...look back at verse 13, first it demands forgetting what lies behind. May I suggest to you that the past is utterly irrelevant? Absolutely irrelevant. The successes of your past are irrelevant to the present. The failures of the past are irrelevant to the present. None of it has any relation either to the future. It doesn't matter that you come to the line and say, "By the way, in my career I've run some great races." Oh really. That isn't the issue. The good old days or the bad old days are gone. And so from a negative standpoint if I'm going to have singlemindedness in my focus of pursuing the knowledge of Christ, I have to forget what is behind...the sins of the past and the victories of the past...the successes of the past, the failures of the past...the honors of the past and the abuses of the past are irrelevant.

When you come to the starting line to run the race, it doesn't matter what you did in the past. It only matters what you're prepared to do in the present. So he says if I'm going to have a singleminded focus to know Christ, I have to forget what is in the past. I think somebody should take this verse and explain it to people today who do counseling and think that the way they're helping people is by dragging them through their past.

And then there's a positive note. He says not only do I forget what lies behind, but I reach forward to what lies ahead. I look at the course and I have to run that course. This reaching forward comes from a Greek word, ektenes which means to stretch to the limit of your capacity. Only this is intensified with the preposition at the beginning *epictenomi(?)*which is the verb form which means an intense stretching, striving, fervently reaching out. Paul says I don't look back, I look forward. I focus on one thing and that is to know Christ...to know Christ. That was his passion.

Pursuing the prize then means being aware of the need in your life, making the maximum effort and having a singleminded and focused concentration.

There's a fourth principle here and it too is simple and direct and yet powerful. Verse 14, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." What he is saying here could perhaps be reduced to a simple statement...I must be spiritually motivated to pursue the prize.

In other words, what he is saying is, I am concerned about upward things. I am concerned about heavenly things. My life is set to attain the heavenly goal. I am not caught up in material things and worldly things and earthly things. It's not my pursuit. When he says in verse 14, "I press on toward..." he uses the word in the Greek kata, it literally means I bear down and I go after the goal.

What is the goal? To know Christ and in knowing Christ to become like Him. When you have an intimate relationship with someone they begin to effect you in a number of ways. One of the ways in which they begin to effect you is by leaving the imprint of their very character on you. When you have an intimate relationship with somebody, their characteristics become your characteristics and that's the pursuit. I bear down and I pursue this goal of knowing Christ deeply and intimately so that I may

be like Him. I am motivated for the kind of prize that is related to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This is anything but a materialistic approach.

Some years ago I wrote a song and the lyric of it goes like this, "O to be like Thee, dear Jesus, my plea...Just to know Thou art formed fully in me...On with Thy beauty, Lord, off with my sin...Fixed on Thy glory, Thy likeness to win...O to be like Thee, Thine image display...This is the Spirit's work day after day...Glory to glory transformed by His grace...Till in Thy presence I stand face to face...O to be like Thee, Thou lover of men...Gracious and gentle, compassionate friend...Merciful Savior such kindness and care...are only mine when Your likeness I share."

It's pursuing the likeness of Christ. You see, it isn't just to know Him for the sake of knowing, it is to know Him for the sake of being.

You'll notice again back in verse 14, "I press on toward the goal which is to know Christ and be like Him, for the prize," brabeion, the runner's prize. And what is it? Now listen carefully. It is Christ's likeness. The goal and the prize are the same. My goal is to know Christ so that I may be like Him and that is the prize...that is the prize.

In 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verses 7 and 8 Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing." Paul is saying here I live my life, I fought the battles, I ran the race, I guarded the faith because of my love for Christ, because I long so deeply for the day when I would fully be like Him, the day when He appeared. The goal of your life as a Christian is to know Christ in order to be like Christ which is not only the goal but also the prize.

What then are the steps? First of all, an awareness of need, maximum effort, focused concentration and spiritual motivation. And I guess just as a brief comment I might close this fourth point by saying, if we are preoccupied with the world and if we are distracted into the worldly things and we become motivated by crass things and possessions that perish, then we will certainly pursue the wrong things because our motives are what drive us. We should be motivated by the longing to be like Christ. John put it this way, if you say you abide in Christ, 1 John 2:6, you ought to walk as He walked. If you say you belong to Him, if you say He is your life, then you ought to pursue Him.

There's a fifth principle that unfolds for us and it's very important for us to understand it and it is this, there must be divine assistance in pursuing the prize. There must be divine assistance in pursuing the prize. Look at verse 15, "Let us therefore as many as are perfect have this attitude, and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." Quite an interesting verse.

Notice that he says as many as are perfect. That's probably sarcasm. He's probably saying, "Now for those of you who think you've already arrived, you need to have this kind of attitude. You need to think properly, and not improperly, and realize that you haven't arrived." Paul said things similar to this when he wrote the Corinthians and he said sarcastically to them, "You are rich, you are kings, you have reigned without us," and then he said, "I would to God that you had." He says you better have the right attitude. And the right attitude is that you aren't perfect and you haven't arrived. But if you are willing to have the right attitude, then God will reveal your failure. That's his point.

He's saying that you need divine assistance in understanding your true condition. You need God to come alongside of you and open up the reality of your life to you and reveal it. It's so easy for us as Christians to think we've gone far enough and maybe we're satisfying God and this is all He asks of us. If you have that attitude, you have the wrong attitude. You must recognize that you need God to reveal to you your true condition.

It's almost as if the Apostle Paul is sort of turning over the recalcitrant Christians to the Lord and saying, "Lord, You're going to have to work on these folks, You're going to have to get them to have a right perspective." As I said earlier, these are very simple points but just...and somewhat repetitious, as I said earlier, one of the things that the Lord wants to do in your life is show you the true condition of your spiritual pilgrimage. He wants to show you your failure. That's why he says in verse 15, "God will reveal it to you. If you have a different attitude, God will show you that you do." If you've got a wrong attitude and it's not an attitude of understanding your need and pursuing with zeal and passion by maximum effort, focused concentration on Christ's likeness, motivated by those spiritual goals, if you lack that and for some strange reason you think you're what you ought to be, then God will reveal to you your true condition. And you need that.

Sometimes the Lord will bring chastening into your life and to my life. Sometimes He brings trials into our lives to show us the true desperation of our condition and to build and strengthen our faith and trust in Him. That's why James says this, and I just remind you of it, he says, "Consider it all joy...chapter 1 verse 2...my brethren, when you encounter various trails, knowing that the testing of your faith..." stop there for a moment.

Why is He testing your faith? For His sake? No, He knows what your faith is like. God doesn't need to test your faith so He can find out what it's like, He can see it with His omniscience. God isn't bringing trials into your life so that He can get a check on you. He doesn't need to read your spiritual dip-stick to know how much oil you have in your tank. He doesn't need to do that. He understands that. That is known to Him. The reason He brings trials into your life is not to show Himself how strong your faith is, but to show you. And God will do that. If you're not pursuing Christ as you should, if you're not going after the goal with that maximum effort and spiritual motivation, then the Lord will bring trials into your life to test your faith to reveal to yourself the condition of your faith. And in the midst of that when you're confused and struggling as to what's going on, James says you can ask

God and He'll show you, He'll reveal to you His proper wisdom for that event.

And then there's one more element in this wonderful, wonderful passage that helps us to understand this pursuit. Look at verse 16, "However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained."

You know what that means? That's really a marvelous, marvelous statement. When he says let us keep living by that same...and the translators have put in the word "standard" to try to convey the meaning, but what the Greek really says here is stay in line...stay in line. And the sixth principle is consistency. Consistency is crucial in pursuing the prize. It takes an awareness of your need, a maximum effort, focused concentration, spiritual motivation, divine assistance, and consistency. Let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Stay in line.

It may be that there's a little bit of the tortoise and the hare in here. It isn't how fast you go in spurts, it's how you plod consistently. Just keep moving from where you are in a forward direction.

This past summer we had the privilege of driving through the Alps when we were in Europe. I suppose a somewhat famous gravestone is at the foot of one of those magnificent and majestic mountains. And on that gravestone is just one little statement, gives the name of the individual and then it says, "He died climbing."

That really has some spiritual implications, doesn't it? We should die climbing. When the time comes for us to go and to be with the Lord, it ought to be that we go in the process of pursuing the prize.

Now let's review briefly. When you came to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, you were enamored and attracted by the wonder and the beauty and the glory and the majesty of His person. And as a result of what you saw in Him, the pearl of great price, the treasure, you said, "I'll give up everything for Him for in Him I find righteousness and in Him I find power and in Him I find endurance through suffering and in Him I find my eternal glory." And you came as an unbeliever to Christ. Christ is no less glorious now and you are no less desperately in need of the deep knowledge of Christ. And so Paul says for the rest of your life, pursue, pursue, pursue the knowledge of Christ.

And we're right back to where we started this morning. This whole matter of Christian living boils down to getting to know Christ deeply and intimately. As we draw this to a conclusion in just a brief study tonight, I want you to look at 1 John because there's a section in 1 John chapter 2 that elucidates this wonderfully. In 1 John chapter 2 and verse 12, down through verse 14, we are given insight into the very similar pattern of spiritual life. John is writing to Christians. And in verse 12 he says, "I am writing to you, little children," and he uses a word there that simply means offspring, referring to them as children of God, they have been born of God. And he says, "I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His namesake." So I'm writing to you Christians

in general. The term "children" here perhaps better translated children than little children, but either is all right. He says I'm writing to you generally as children of God.

Now there's a sense in which we are all children all our life long. I am still the child of my parents. My mother and father left yesterday morning but they had been with us for the better part of a week and it doesn't matter how old I am, I will always be my mother's son. And my mother will always treat me like her little boy. I will always be her son. And the same is true of my father. When he sees me, even though he sees an adult man, he sees in me all of the years of life as his child.

And that's the sense in which John speaks here. I'm just writing to you because you're all children of God at various points in your spiritual development. You've all had your sins forgiven.

But then in verses 13 and 14 he splits this concept of being a child of God into three parts. Verses 13 and 14 I'll read for you, "I am writing to you fathers because you know Him who has been from the beginning, I am writing to you young men because you have overcome the evil one, I have written to you children because you know the Father." And then in a somewhat repetitious way, changing the tenses of the verb he says, "I have written to you fathers because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you young men because you are strong and the Word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one."

He says this, you are all children but you fall into three categories. Some of you are fathers in your own spiritual maturity. Some of you are young men and some of you are babies. The word that he uses for "children" at the end of verse 13 means babies. Now he's not talking about a generic kind of child, he's talking about a specific baby. And he says you're all children and you've all been saved but you're at three levels of spiritual growth. Some of you are babies, some of you are young men and some of you are fathers...three levels of spiritual maturity.

Now what makes the difference? What is the distinguishing feature here? Well it all has to do with knowing God, knowing Christ. It's all related to our knowledge. You move along the path of spiritual growth related to your knowledge. That's why the Apostle Paul in Ephesians was so consumed with praying that we might be filled with all the knowledge of God in Christ. That's why he said the same thing to the Colossians that they might be enlightened and that they might know Christ. Because spiritual growth is directly related to our knowing.

Now let me show you what I mean. Look at the end of verse 13, he says, "I have written to you children, or babies, because you know the Father." A spiritual baby which would be the least mature of any Christian is one who just knows God. It's kind of like spiritual "dada." This is a person who could say, "I know God. I know the Lord. I've come to know Him." Sunday night after Sunday night as we have baptisms, you hear people come into the water and they will say, "I have come to know Christ. I've come to know God and it's so wonderful to know Him." It's sort of like spiritual "dada" as I

said, it's just the basics, they know the Lord. They don't know much else but they know the Lord. Now that's a wonderful thing but it's a vulnerable place to be, isn't it? Doesn't Ephesians 4 tell us in verse 14 that children tend to be tossed to and fro and carried about by every...what?...every wind of doctrine, and they become victimized by the cunning craftiness of Satan and his spiritual sleight of hand because they are not discerning. They are like those people mentioned in Hebrews chapter 5 who have not had their senses exercised to be able to discern.

Spiritual children know the Lord but they don't know much else. And it's very easy for them to be victimized by false teaching. Typically speaking, false teachers in the Christian church, those who don't understand biblical theology and biblical doctrine properly have a field day with spiritual babies. So you don't want to stay there. That's why Peter said, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." You can't stay at that level because you'll become victimized by what you don't know. So you must pursue knowledge.

That takes us to the second level. In verse 13 and 14 he mentions young men. In verse 13 he says, "I am writing to you young men because you have overcome the evil one." Now he says let me tell you about a spiritual young man. He is no longer able to be deceived by the cunning craftiness of Satan who is trying to deceive him about doctrine, who is trying to victimize him by his spiritual sleight of hand and his error. The spiritual young man has overcome the evil one, not in the sense that he never sins but remember, Satan is disguised as an angel of light, 99.5 percent, or whatever, of his energies are spent in false doctrine. And a spiritual young man has overcome the evil one in the sense that he's no longer a child tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Why? Because he has increased knowledge of Scripture.

Verse 14, "I have written to you young men because you're strong, that's how you overcame him. How did you get strong? The Word of God abides in you and you've overcome the evil one." The second level of spiritual growth then is to know sound doctrine, to know doctrine. And you no longer are a victim. I can usually tell when someone comes to this point in their Christian life, they want to battle error, they want to battle heresy, they want to fight the cults, they want to straighten everybody out on every nuance of theology. Because they're moving away from being victimized and confused and not understanding all of the issues to getting a grasp on sound doctrine. That is the second kind of knowing.

The first kind of knowing is where you know the Lord, the knowledge of the Lord. You know Him as Father, you know Christ as Savior and Lord and Redeemer but you don't know much else and you're easily victimized. The second thing is as you study the Word and study the Word and you pursue the knowledge of God, you begin to understand the truth of the Word of God and you become a spiritual young man and you're strong and you're not victimized by error.

But there's another kind of knowing. More than just the initial knowing of Christ that makes you a babe, and more than just the knowing of theology and doctrine that makes you a young man, please notice at the beginning of verse 13 and the beginning of verse 14, he says, "I am writing to you fathers because you know Him who has been from the beginning." Verse 14, "I have written to you fathers because you know Him who has been from the beginning." And what is he saying? A spiritual father who is at the pinnacle of spiritual growth doesn't just know God in a limited way, doesn't just know theology, but has come to plumb the depths of the eternal Lord Himself. You know the eternal one. You know the eternal Lord. This is a knowing beyond the facts.

You say, "Well what do you mean by that?" This is the knowing of experience. This is the knowing of walking with God and seeing Him work in your life. This is the deep personal knowledge of His ministry in your life. This is a knowing that comes after years of experience as you see God involved in your life, delivering you from this or that, as you see Him convicting you of sin, as you see Him bringing trials to sharpen your spiritual focus and to knock off the rough edges of your carnality. This is knowing God intimately, this is knowing God personally, this is knowing Christ in an intimate personal way by prayer and communion. This is knowing that He loves you because you've accumulated enough experiences in which He's proved it. This is knowing that He guides you because you've seen it over and over again. This is knowing that He cares for you and protects you because you've experienced it repeatedly and you know have the accumulated knowledge of God's personal involvement in your life that goes beyond just the facts. This is the kind of knowing that Paul wanted.

It's wonderful to know the Lord as a baby. It's wonderful to say, "Yes, I didn't know God but now I know Him through Christ and I have a personal relationship with Him." It's wonderful to know sound doctrine and sound theology but far more than these things is the knowing, the deep knowing of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and thus through Him the knowing of God. That's our pursuit. When Paul said, "That may I may know Him," he wasn't saying I want to know Him like a baby does. It was more than that. He wasn't saying, "I want to know Him like a theologian does." What he was saying was, "I want to plumb the depths of His eternal being." And so, Paul said, "I found Him so desirable, I found Him so magnificent, I found Him so beautiful, I found Him such a treasure, such a pearl that I gave up everything for the knowledge of Him, the surpassing value of knowing Him and I continue to pursue that knowledge and I want to pursue it as the very purpose of my life. It is the goal of my life and it yields the very prize of my life, that is to know Him so that I become like Him."

In conclusion I just bring you this brief and simple study tonight to say to you that I have a burden in my heart for you as your shepherd and your pastor as I do for the church at large and that is that I fear Christianity is moving far, far away from such a pursuit. I think sometimes we study the Bible for its curiosity sake. I think sometimes we study the Bible out of duty. I think sometimes we study the Bible to get some kind of an emotional fix. But I wonder whether we study the Word of God and whether we commune with God in prayer in order that we might enter into the deep knowledge of

Christ and thus becoming knowledgeable about Him we become like Him. That is the goal of spiritual growth and thus that is the responsibility of the shepherd to push his sheep in that direction.

Father, we thank You tonight for this reminder that knowing Christ is knowing Christ is everything. There's so much more to be said and we can only ask that Your Holy Spirit would say it to our hearts. We want to know You. We certainly sang it earlier, "Lord, we want to know You, live our lives to show You all the love we owe You, we're seekers of Your heart." There it is, that's the pursuit. That's the prize, to know You deeply, to know Your heart, and to find ourselves in knowing You like You. The goal is the prize and the very purpose for which we were saved. And some day you will make us like Christ when we see Him as He is. Until that time as long as we live in this mortal flesh, may we pursue that goal to Your glory in our Savior's name. Amen.

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