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# The Bible Student

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## ‘THAT I MAY KNOW HIM’

The Passionate Pursuit of a Life Purpose

A. McD. REDWOOD

Writing to the Christians in Philippi the apostle Paul draws aside the curtain behind which his past lies hidden as it were, and for a brief moment reveals his ancestry; that he was ‘of the stock of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews’ (Phil. 3:5). In so doing he takes us back to Benjamin of whom it was stated by Jacob in his last prophetic blessing: ‘Benjamin is a wolf that raveneth’ (Gen. 49:27). He goes on to state of himself that, ‘as touching the Law, he was a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the Church; as touching the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless’ (v. 6). It was no mean record, and from the standpoint of orthodox Judaism it was an outstanding example of religious zeal and devotion to the God of Israel so far as his knowledge enabled him. Note his words: ‘If any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh—*I yet more*’, he declares.

In reviewing that life-record we must give all due weight to the high motive and idealism of such religious attainments. It was never petty, never mere shameless snobbery, not even selfish. It has the simple truth that, as an example of a righteousness accruing from a sedulous keeping of law and prescribed ritual—it was ‘*blameless*’! It is well to take the lesson to heart, for much of the present-day so-called ‘Christian’ life and practice would find it somewhat difficult even to attempt a similar comparison with any hope of success.

But there came the day of sudden, dramatic transformation in Paul's life, as recorded by Luke in Acts, chap. 9, which for fulness and yet brevity cannot be matched. From that hour to the end of his life, he held but one absorbing ambition: 'that Christ shall be magnified in my body whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21). 'Yea, verily, I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord' (Phil. 3:8). Then immediately he adds, as the crowning ambition of his life's purpose: 'that I may know HIM. . . .' (v. 10). In that statement he still had in mind the words of Annanias on that dramatic occasion of their meeting in Damascus—by 'divine appointment': 'Brother Saul, receive thy sight. . . . The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth. . . .' That became the absorbing ideal of his life, as shown in his letter to the contentious Corinthian believers: 'determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:2). Here, indeed is a living pattern of what is meant by the term 'the passionate pursuit of a Life-Purpose'. But we cannot 'know God' apart from 'knowing Christ come in the flesh for our redemption.'

Turning now from that illustration of what it means to KNOW GOD in the reality of such a personal experience, it is essential to see it in the fuller and more comprehensive content of the whole *Divine Purpose* of God's self-revelation 'for us men and our salvation'. Whence did it arise? What does it involve? What ultimate objectives or plan does it reach out to? These are some of the questions inherent in what is a large theme and which runs through the whole Bible. For our present purpose we deal only with a few of its more elementary and obvious aspects, and mainly to incite to a personal study of the Scriptures for ourselves. We shall first look at

#### The Glory of Its Conception

The Message of the Old Testament reveals two very obvious features. The first is that of man's state of alienation from God originating in the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Following close

on that is seen the manner of God's repeated revelations of Himself to all whose hearts were prepared to follow His counsels, mediated through prophets, priests and kings obedient to His voice and will. The epic story of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage is full of the self-revelation of God, in one form or another: So much so that Moses is able to utter the prophecy that God shall bring His people into the promised land which, he asserts, 'Thou, O Lord, hast made for *Thee* to dwell in, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established' (Exod. 15:17). Then came the days of the Temple and nationhood of the people of Israel; and centuries later such prophets as Isaiah and kings like Uzziah. It was in one of Israel's national crises, the year that king Uzziah died, that Isaiah saw the LORD sitting upon a Throne, high and lifted up, and His train ('the skirts of His robing') filled the Temple'. But, for the nation at large God was the Absent-One: They knew of Him; but Himself they knew not because of their chronic state of alienation. Isaiah had to exclaim out of the yearning of his heart 'My people have gone into captivity *for lack of knowledge* and their honourable men are famished . . .' (Isa. 5: 13); their lack being due to hardness of heart and alienation from God. But just as often God in long-suffering patience renewed His promises; e.g., 'I will give them *a heart to know Me*, that I am Jehovah; for they shall be my people (again), and I will be their God: for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart' (Jer. 24: 7). Nationally, for the Jews, that word still remains to be fulfilled in the coming day of their restoration: 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying '*Know the LORD*', for they shall all know Me, from the least unto the greatest, saith the LORD' (Jer. 3:31ff. Cf. chap. 24:7).

Tragically as the nation had failed, the divine and glorious Ideal shall be realised. The same prophet sets it before us purposely to encourage true spiritual aspiration for its attainment, though impossible in our own strength: note his words: 'Thus

saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth *glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth ME, that I am the LORD*, who exerciseth lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD' (Jer. 9:23, 24).

The Old Testament Canon closes ere the realization of this intimate knowledge of God could be attained except in a comparatively few instances. It had to await the Coming of the Son of God Himself, Who would not only deal with the cause of man's ignorance but would also open the door to a far truer personal and age-enduring knowledge of God Himself. But in the intervening centuries God was silent until in due time He began again to reveal Himself to mankind: An Infant's cry rising from a manger in Bethlehem broke the silence; and through the subsequent ministries of 'the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father' men began to learn afresh the knowledge of God in

#### The Miracle of Its Revelation

A New Era had begun: and, to refer again to Paul; the Passionate Pursuit of his Life-purpose into which this erstwhile Pharisee had flung himself spirit, soul and body, left its indelible mark on the world's history because it was centred in the very Person he had once persecuted in persecuting His followers, the Christ of God. But note (for our particular purpose) that in learning to know Him, he discovered he had come into a growing knowledge of the triune GOD: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is exactly what the Old Testament history had pointed forward to: 'God, having of old time spoken unto the Fathers in the Prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath in the end of these days spoken unto us in the person of the Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world ('ages' = the universe); who being the effulgence of His glory, and the expression of His substance (R.V. margin) . . . .' (Heb. 1:1-3). Jesus himself makes clear His own ministry: 'I am the Way, the

Truth and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father but through Me. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also: from henceforth ye know HIM, and have seen HIM' (Jn. 14:6, 7). It is also significant that this 14th chapter contains a remarkable revelation of what it means to KNOW GOD in the truest sense: The Speaker is the Son Himself (vs. 6, 10, 13); and vs. 7-15 refer to the Father; whilst vs. 16-18, 25, 26 allude to the Holy Spirit.

Paul's great exposition of justification by faith—one of the great foundations of our Christian standing before God is similarly based upon the fuller revelation and saving work of the Triune God: (a) 'beng justified by faith we have *peace with God*'; (b) 'through our *Lord Jesus Christ*'; 'and the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts *through the Holy Spirit* which was given to us' (Rom. 1:1-5). How accustomed we are to repeat the Benediction: 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all', yet often failing to appreciate its full meaning and the glory of its fundamental implications. Also it is not without definite significance that Christ's own command ere He ascended to the Father was: 'Go ye and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into *the NAME* (not names, be it noted) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.

In these and other scriptures we are made aware of the fact of the Holy Trinity in the Godhead; but do we ever take time to ponder its meaning and the wonder of its implications? To take it for granted is all very well for such as do not have the mental ability, but such as are able and take time to think of it a little more deeply will grow in fuller spiritual understanding and appreciation of the Glorious and Ineffable Being of God, Who has loved us so greatly as to give His only Son for our salvation! Jeremiah the prophet strikes an exalted note, given him by God Himself for our present and eternal benefaction: 'Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in *this*, that he understandeth, and *knoweth ME*, that I AM THE LORD who exercise

lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness; for in these I delight, saith the Lord' (Jer. 9:23, 24). And it is no mere redundancy to quote the prophet Micah's exclamation of holy wonder 'Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?' And note the closing word: 'He retaineth not His anger for ever, *because He delighteth in mercy*' (Micah 7:18, 19).

Pause yet another moment and consider: in Scripture the doctrine of the Trinity is always assumed *because it is revealed*, though never expounded. The basis of the doctrine is laid deep in the *Unique Oneness*: GOD IS ONE! Moule states the meaning (as far as it can be stated) thus: 'The Divine Nature is not *like* human nature, distributed through or realized in a class of individuals, it is the Nature of ONE BEING, Who is at once the Individual and the Kind'. That is, the Deity of Scripture is One Being in a sense infinitely more profound and real than anything known in creation. The Oneness of the Godhead implies Unity of 'Essence'; of Spirit 'Substance'; of 'Character'; that is, of Eternal 'Content', ineffable, incomparable, and absolute. This is supported by a number of Scriptures in the O. T. and N. T.; for example: 'Hear, O Israel: the LORD (Jehovah) our God is One LORD'. This is quoted by Christ Himself in Mark 12:29, 30; and the scribe in the narrative immediately assents to the truth of a passage well-known to every Israelite (see vs. 32, 33).

At the same time there is also *Relationship* within the Godhead Itself. In one respect It is One; in an equally distinctive respect it is Three in One: Three eternally harmonious Persons, Agents, Wills; *Persons*, because Each is possessed of Understanding, of Will, of Love—a consciousness and appreciation of the Moral beyond all human conception. Each is possessed of the Divine Nature, and is essentially and eternally ONE in Being with the others; hence Each is truly GOD. There are *not three Gods*; but there are *Three Persons in the Godhead*. All speculation on the part of mere man is hopeless, for 'the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God—but unto us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God' (1 Cor. 2:9-16). And the promise of Christ to us is: 'The Spirit of Truth shall guide you into *all* the truth . . .'

(John. 16:13, 14).

(To be concluded in next issue)