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GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST



By Nelson Thomas

One of the major differences between religion and Christianity is that the former is based on certain ideologies whereas the latter is based on a person. In other words, one can be religious without having any personal knowledge of its founder, but one cannot be a true Christian without having a personal knowledge and relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice a few verses spoken by the Lord Himself.

“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40)

- Who gets everlasting life? The one who sees the Son and believes in Him.

“And He said to them, “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” (John 8:23, 24)

- Who will die in their sins? The one who refuses to believe the deity of Christ will die in their sins. Faith in Christ’s perfect divinity and perfect manhood is imperative for salvation.

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3)

- Once again the Lord underscores the importance of knowing Him as the eternal Son, distinct from God the Father in the Godhead.

Let's consider three requirements about this knowledge:

Req.
01

SCRIPTURAL

INTIMATE

Req.
02

Req.
03

TRANSFORMATIVE

SCRIPTURAL

This understanding about the Lord Jesus Christ should be as revealed in the New Testament, not as any of the diverse opinions propagated by the sceptics.

INTIMATE

It should not be just an intellectual awareness, but a very personal and experiential understanding.

TRANSFORMATIVE

It should affect one's heart and mind and thus the whole life being changed.

Of course, there is a 'Christian religion' too which has nothing to do with the faith and practice of a true follower of Christ outlined in the New Testament.

A true born-again child of God is one who has understood and acknowledged the scriptural revelations about the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only His unique and perfect person and His atoning work on the cross, but the scripture also reveals His present ministry.

Before one can be saved or regenerated, each one has to know and confess all these truths and yield to the Lordship of Christ. (Romans 10:9 cf. John 1:12). That is why the apostles preached Christ, nothing else. (1Cori. 1: 22 – 25; 2:2).

Apostle Peter at the end of his second epistle exhorts the readers to grow in this knowledge. (2 Peter 3:18). He refers to 'knowledge' seven times in this letter - twice about the blessings we already got as a result of knowing Christ (1:3; 2:20) and four times about the need to progress in that knowledge. (cf. 1:2, 5, 8; 3:18).

RESULTS OF GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

01



Spiritual rest,
Matthew 11:29

02



Spiritual
freedom,
John 8: 32, 36

03



Spiritual
Renewal,
John 6: 53, 57

04



Spiritual
Fruits,
John 15:4, 5

05



Encouragement,
Hebrews 12:3

1. SPIRITUAL REST, MATTHEW 11:29

Soon after inviting ‘all who labor and are heavy laden’ to Him to receive rest in v. 28, Christ makes an interesting appeal in v. 29.

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29)

The Rest in v. 28 is what we get at conversion when the burden of sin, guilty conscience, and self-efforts for salvation all come to an end.

The Rest in v. 29 refers to the practical peaceful life from all anxieties of day-to-day life. That is the outcome of learning from Christ by staying close to Him and listening to Him on a daily basis.

The story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10 illustrates this (Luke 10: 38 – 42). The Lord rebuked Martha for being worried and troubled over simple things that led to bitterness and a judgmental attitude. He pointed out the example of Mary who chose to sit calmly at His feet to learn from Him. Not only it has eternal value, but it also helped her to experience a peaceful heart. (Cf. Phil 4:7).

2. SPIRITUAL FREEDOM, JOHN 8: 32, 36

Here the Lord speaks primarily of the deliverance that one experiences at conversion. The worst kind of bondage that man is facing today is the slavery of sin. But alas, many are not even aware of the reality of their oppression! (John 8:33, 34).

Apostle Peter warns that even after conversion, there is a possibility to be under 'bondage'. (2 Peter 2: 20). Of course, a true born-again believer cannot come under the captivity of Satan again. (John 10:28). However, one can lose that joy of liberty and be enslaved by sin if they are not consistently growing in the knowledge of Christ. (Heb. 12:1).

Don't we see many children of God being controlled by self, pride, ego, bad habits, bad temper, worry, etc.? With a gloomy face, they avoid others; preferring loneliness to fellowship. How can they enjoy true liberty in Christ?

All such bondages of daily life disappear as we stay close to Christ and progress in our relationship with Him.

3. SPIRITUAL RENEWAL, JOHN 6: 53, 57

We received eternal life by knowing Christ (John 6:40; 17:3), and to sustain and grow in this new life, we ought to continue to know and enjoy His intimacy through His word. (Colo. 3:4, 10 cf. Luke 24: 44; John 5:39).

This experience is similar to a tree planted near the waters that spreads out its roots by the river drawing sufficient resources to stay green and fresh in any season. (Psa. 1:3; Jere. 17: 8). Similarly, to continually walk in the newness of life, one needs a constant supply of the life of Christ drawn by being rooted in Him. (Colo. 2:7; Rom. 6:4).

4. SPIRITUAL FRUITS, JOHN 15:4, 5

Using the analogy of the vine and branches, our Lord made it clear, without abiding in Him no one can produce spiritual fruits. Just as a well-watered tree not only stays fresh and green but also produces its fruits in its season, a Christian who regularly lives in union with Christ will bear spiritual fruits. (Psa. 1:3).

The New Testament refers to various kinds of fruits, but the most important is the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is the Christ-like life (Gala 5: 22). Reproducing His life is possible only by allowing His word to dwell richly in us and Christ Himself to live in and through us. (Colo. 3:16).

Our spiritual fruitfulness and development are always in proportion to the degree of our intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a progressive and sustained transformation. (cf. 2Cor. 3:18; 2Peter 1:8).

Discouraged and drifting Hebrew Christians were exhorted to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. (cf. 2:9; 3:1; 12:2). Concentrating on people or adverse circumstances robs our joy and progress.

But we need to pay close attention to the person of Christ, His greatness, and even His sufferings, which becomes an example and challenge to us. In the midst of untold pain and agony; accusation and slander, our Lord's example exhorts us to stay calm and quiet. (1Peter 2:21).

CONCLUSION:

Of course, there are much more benefits from growing in the knowledge of Christ. In fact, our entire Christian life depends upon how well we know our Lord. Poor and distorted views of Christ will be reflected in our practical Christian life, individually as well as collectively.

Consider the troubled local churches mentioned in the New Testament; all of them in one way or other lost the right view of Christ.

- Corinthians were looking at the leaders instead of Christ.
- Galatians looked at Moses instead of Christ.
- Colossians failed to hold on to Christ the head of the Church.
- Hebrew Christians began to look back.
- Ephesians lost their first love for Christ.
- The church of the Laodiceans just put Him out! (Rev 3:20)

No wonder while writing letters to each of those seven local assemblies in Asia, the Lord began with one of the aspects of His glory revealed to John the Apostle at the Island Patmos. (Cf. Reve. 1: 12 – 17; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) In other words, the solution to all our spiritual problems begins with a right view of Christ.

Remember, our entire Christian life and service is affected by our growing intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ. For a blessed and fruitful Christian life, it is important to steadily grow in the knowledge of Christ.

Let us fix our eyes and thoughts on Him. Fill our hearts and minds with His word. Stay close to Christ and thus be transformed into His same image from glory to glory, little by little.

LET NOTHING MOVE YOU

 By Sam K. John, Bangalore

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1Cor 15:58)

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul gives an exposition of the mystery of the resurrection. After explaining what will happen to our bodies after our death and the glorious hope that all of us have in Christ, he concludes with a very practical aspect in verse 58.

Paul was an amazing theologian and a prolific writer. God used him to reveal some of the wonderful mysteries of God through his written work. Yet, he was a very practical person, for he knew that life on this earth is a tough one. He writes this to Corinthians as an exhortation and encouragement.

Let's read the same verse in another translation. “Oh, my dear brothers and sisters stand firm let nothing move you, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

‘Let nothing move you’; let nothing stop you from serving the Lord, let nothing rob you of your zeal and joy of serving Christ in His vineyard. When Paul wrote this exhortation, he knew from his own experience that we live in a broken world where the fallen effects of sin have a possibility of affecting us at every turn of our lives.

SHAKING STORIES

‘Let nothing move you’. A few months ago I happened to stay at the home of an evangelist whom I knew earlier, but for the first time I was staying overnight with them. They have a child who is bedridden since birth for the last 32 years. Can you imagine the daily struggle that happens in that family? Here is an evangelist family, husband and wife called to serve the Lord; they have a child bedridden totally dependent on them for 32 years. I happened to hear as a passing remark from that dear brother, though not with any regret, “It has been years, since me and my wife together went for a conference”, because they have a child to take care of.

There are many other things in all of our lives that we don't share with other people. Some of the burdens we carry, some of the crosses we are called to bear, we don't share with others. We don't want to make ourselves look vulnerable, but everyone reading this will have a similar story to share.

I remember attending a conference a few years ago. Among the 30 people participating, there was a director of a worldwide organization, which has ministry in 130 countries. During the time of prayer, he stood up and started to cry. As tears flowed down his cheeks he was pleading with the Lord's people saying, "Brethren, I want you to pray for my daughter who is grown up and married but not yet in the Lord."

Can you imagine the pain and hurt of this man who moves around the world preaching the gospel, taking efforts to win others for Christ? But in his own home, there is an unsaved person; how much hurt and disappointment that servant faces!

I don't know how many of you have heard this about William Carey. Today we all talk about his achievements, but those who have gone through his biography will know that every day when he returned to his home, William Carey was struggling to take care of his wife who was mentally derailed. How can one have such a life and not be shaken?

It is true; our love for Christ motivates us to be faithful to Him. But consider this; some of us are called to serve the Lord in the midst of pain, suffering, and difficulty. I don't know what is your pain and troubles, but God in His sovereignty appointed some of us to carry severe burdens.

The question is how do you remain faithful in service in spite of the daily discouragement, tormenting, and hurt? How do you keep the zeal for service and move on forward? Paul's exhortation is, 'Brethren, let nothing move you – always abound in the work of the Lord'.

EXAMPLE OF PAUL

Paul was not writing this as an ivory tower theologian. He wrote from his own experiences. When we look at his life, at every turn of his life Paul faced so many discouragements. For example, from Acts 22 onwards we see that he was arrested and on his own request taken to Rome, where he was waiting for the trial. In Acts 28 we read about him preaching the gospel and giving leadership to churches, now confined to a room being under house arrest, but he did not allow this sudden crisis to dampen his spirit.

Just as he wrote to the Corinthians that nothing should move them, he showed from his own experience, that he did not allow such circumstances to move or shake him. In Acts 28:30, 31 we read, “He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” (ESV)

How do you do that? All of a sudden life changes from good to bad, from positive to negative, how do you make quick adjustments? How do you not allow the devil to rob your zeal and boldness?

Paul is an example. Although confined to a room, he welcomed all, doing an amazing ministry, receiving them with gladness, encouraging them, and sharing the gospel with the soldiers. He did not waste a single moment. He used the time in confinement to write letters of edification and encouragement to individuals and the churches he planted. There are many things we can learn from Paul.

What an amazing example! Let nothing move you; always give yourselves for the work of the Lord fully, in spite of the disappointments and trials. You can continue serving the Lord zealously because “You know your labour in the Lord is not vain”. In spite of all kinds of difficulties, continue to hold on, and proceed forward with the grace of God, but why? Whatever you do, even in the midst of your pain, and suffering, is not in vain. God uses it all for His glory.

Perhaps, many of us may be serving in pioneering places where we don’t have much encouragement. You may not see the fruit of your labour, or when we compare our work with others there may be a lot of discouragement. Paul is saying here, “look, your labour is not in vain, whatever you do for the Lord is not in vain.”

STORY OF JOY RIDDERHOF

Let me conclude with a story that will encourage each one of us. There was a young woman called, Joy Ridderhof. She was a North American who had committed her life to the service of the Lord. She wanted to go to an unreached place to serve the Lord faithfully. The Lord took her to a Central American country called HONDURAS. That was her mission field. She started serving the Lord. Within a few years, she became sick and could not continue serving the Lord. Finally, she had to return to her native place. Even after returning to her native place, her zeal for the Lord was so much that she wanted to do something for the people of HONDURAS.

As she prayerfully waited for the Lord's guidance, she got the idea to record a song and bible passage on a Gramophone record and pass it on to the people of HONDURAS. She called some of her friends and said, "I will record, and can you take it to my people in HONDURAS?" They complied; the villagers of HONDURAS welcomed the recordings with much excitement. They sought more and asked for more gramophone records.

Eventually in 1939 along with some of her friends, Joy started an organization called Gospel Recordings International to reach the world with the gospel of Christ. By the time she died in 1984 at the age of 81, that organization had produced gospel materials in 4000 languages.

For your labor in the midst of your difficulty is not in vain. One day, as Paul writes, in that glorious morning, when we all wake up, then we shall meet our Lord face to face, then comes the time when the real worth of our labor for Him will be revealed. There will be great joy on that day for those who laboured under trials and tribulations. "Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing." 2 Tim. 4:8.

May the Lord help us to press on in spite of whatever we are going through, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

(This article is the edited transcript of the devotion message shared by the writer during the recently concluded GFTI conference in Chennai.)

OUTLINE

BELIEVER'S UNSEARCHABLE RICHES IN CHRIST, EPH 3:8

1. *Riches of His goodness, Rom 2:4*
2. *Riches of His glory, Rom 9:23; Eph 3:16*
3. *Riches of the wisdom and Knowledge of God, Rom 11:33*
4. *Riches of His Grace, Eph 1:7*
5. *Riches of the glory of His inheritance, Eph 1:18*
6. *His Riches in Glory, Phil 3:19*
7. *Riches of the glory of mystery, Colo 1:27*
8. *Riches of the full assurance of understanding, Colo 2:2*
9. *Riches of the reproach of Christ, Heb 11:26*

Notes on Tabernacle – 17:

THE BRAZEN LAVER (Contd)

 By Charles E. Wigg, Australia

Special Bronze:

We are told in Exo 38: 8, that the laver was made of the bronze-looking glasses, (mirrors,) that had been used by the women who served at the door of the Tabernacle. Three times in the New Testament, we are told that the word of God is like a mirror, 1 Cor 13: 12; 2 Cor. 3: 18, and James 1: 22-25. All these emphasize that this cleansing comes through the word of God, Eph. 5: 26.

It works out like this: You read in the word of God, it becomes a mirror, and shows you, by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, things that are unclean, faults, sins in your life. The same Holy Spirit then convicts you through the word and leads you to repentance. The sins are then confessed by you to the Lord Jesus, they are forgiven and cleansed away from your life. The link of communion that the sins had broken is then restored, and you can go happily, without fear into the holy place, the immediate presence of God.

The Laver's foot:

We are not given any details of the design of the Laver, only the "Laver and its foot, (or stand,)" are mentioned. I have seen many illustrations of what Bible Teachers thought the Laver was like, and most depict it as a cup and saucer, the upper vessel for washing the hands, the lower for the feet.

The model that impressed me most was that which was used by the late brother Handley Bird, an English missionary who was mightily used of God in India.

His model of the laver was a vessel resting on the back of a bronze ox. He had no doubt got that idea from the details that are given of the Temple built by Solomon. The Temple was really an enlarged version of the Tabernacle but built of solid durable materials.

In the Temple, there was a bronze sea, which rested on the backs of twelve oxen. Some believe that the sea was a huge reservoir, and the water continually poured from the mouths of the oxen, was collected in a lower receptacle, and drained away.

In that case, the oxen would remind us of the unfailing patience of God. How patiently He bears with us in our failures, and when we turn to Him for cleansing and forgiveness, He never turns us away, and James told us that "In many things, we often offend".

We are commanded that before attending the remembrance meeting, to partake of the Lord's Supper, we are to examine ourselves, and only then to eat of the bread and drink of the cup, and to do so worthily.



UNPRECEDENTED ATROCITIES AGAINST CHRISTIANS

Tribal Christians in the state of Chhattisgarh in India have been going through unparalleled persecution in the recent months.

The recent aggression intensified when the majority community groups conducted series of regional meetings and made various measures to pressurise Christians to either convert to their religion or leave the village itself. They banned Christians from attending prayers, conducting rituals like wedding or funerals. They also banned Christian leaders from visiting members' homes, and even restricted Christians from buying or selling goods and from working.



When such tactics were not successful, Christians were brutally attacked and evicted from their homes. They also vandalised and demolished their houses and prayer halls. As a result, around 1500 were displaced in 33 villages of Narayanpur and Kondagaon region of Chhattisgarh.

According to some civil rights groups, it was due to the inaction of the authorities that violence escalated against tribal Christians. It is estimated that during the past 3 years, 400 incidents of violence against Christians have been documented in Chhattisgarh.

ANECDOTE

GROWING IN THE LORD



By John Maxwell

A group of tourists visiting a picturesque village walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked him, "Were any great men born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

Every person who is a born-again believer starts life as a baby in Christ. Whether the new convert is six or sixty, that person is still a new Christian and needs to grow in the Lord. A baby Christian who has been saved for forty years is a tragedy. God intends for us to grow and mature so that we can be a positive influence in the lives of others. Until we learn to dig into the meat of the Word for ourselves, we will never grow.

Straying into a Slippery Path! Joshua 1:7, 8

 By Stanley K Sam, Secunderabad

God prepared Joshua for a successful service by revealing the inspired Word. But it had to be kept by the people in obeying the Word. Because God is the Author, it is always “alive and powerful” (Hebrews 4:12). It’s by applying Scripture that our meditations will ultimately lead to an abundant and maturing Christian life. Every step we take by placing faith in God’s grace, there’s the promise of His salvation and His continuous provision.

Though we’ll have trials, struggles and troubles yet with all these there is also God’s promise of deliverances throughout our lives. Just as Joshua had overcome the fortified strongholds in Canaan, so we must wrestle with sin that indwells us and live victoriously against the supernatural powers of darkness and the ungodly system of the world.

It is not an easy task to confront the ungodly system. The three enemies: the flesh, the world and the Devil are realities

that are constantly fighting against us. To face these fearlessly, we must possess an unusual measure of moral courage and faithfulness in life. Through this call to be “courageous” (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9), Joshua was commissioning many to a work that was far beyond their own abilities.

Nevertheless, to obtain strength, we should not turn from God’s law either to the left or the right. This was not going to be easy. And it is neither easy even today. It can be achieved only by constant meditation of God’s Word day and night. When God’s Word gets established in our hearts and minds, only then will our character get molded and our steps get guided.

Today, we are straying away from the absolute truth of God’s Word and are on a slippery and unstable path that has no authoritative system of law or morals. If we don’t follow the Scripture, then our indifference will ultimately bring about a complete defeat.

(From Mid-week meditations - Used with permission)

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