

That You Might Know Him Better

Ephesians 1:17-18

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Introduction:

Ephesians has been just packed full of encouragement, hasn't it?

- There are those first 14 verses that talk about how God gets glory by pouring out and pouring out and pouring out the riches of His grace on all His elect...
 - He delights in taking us from the very depths of depravity, from the very lowest place as the most wretched of creatures—
 - made in His image and now making a mess of that image by our sin, corrupting it, defiling it and so defiling His name...
 - I say, He loves to take the most wretched of creatures like us...
 - and pour out such grace on us that we end up sharing eternal glory with Him as His very own sons and daughters!
 - When He is finished with us, we will actually be privileged to live in the fellowship that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have shared for all eternity.
 - We will be able to love perfectly according to our capacity as creatures, just as we ought!
 - and we will be able to receive all the love and behold all the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of which we are capable as creatures.

After Paul finished setting forth all these marvellous benefits,

- He told the Ephesians in verse 15 that when he heard reports about them—that they had faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints,
 - He was filled with thanksgiving to God!
 - Because they had faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints, this indicated that they were among the elect...
 - It indicated that God, by His marvellous power, had begun the new heavenly life in them that Paul has just been eulogising!
 - It indicated that they were the recipients of this grace, chosen from before the foundation of the world in Christ to inherit all the blessings.
- And because Paul saw the Ephesians as those who were among the called,
 - He not only gave thanks for them,

- but he also prayed for them without ceasing..
- He prayed for them because he knew that as God had begun new life in them,
 - He would go on to bring it to perfection.
 - They would have all the privileges of eternal life.
 - And so with eagerness, Paul prays for this marvellous work to go forward!
- Last week I showed you that his prayer was fuelled (as our prayers should also be fuelled) by Paul's knowledge of the God to whom He prays!
 - He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ—the very God who graciously sent His Son into the world to secure all of the blessings of salvation for His elect!
 - Such a God would surely bring to completion that gracious saving work He did so much to secure for His people!
 - And that He is the Father of glory (or the glorious Father)—
 - and so is just the way a Father ought to be—He is the ideal Father—the perfect Father—the glorious Father...
 - and He is also the Father of glory—the one who is the source of all glory that is and so is able to give good gifts to His sons and to make them glorious and to surround them with glorious things!
 - With such a God as his God,
 - Paul is able to pray large prayers for the Ephesians, and for all others.
 - He knows His God will made good on all His promises—that He is willing and able and faithful to do all that He has spoken.

Now this week,

- I want to show you the encouragement that comes to us when we consider the things that Paul asked the Lord to do for the Ephesians...
 - Paul's description of his prayer for the Ephesians is not just a piece of historical information about what he prayed...
 - It is recorded for us in God's Word for our encouragement and help!
 - This morning I want to show you three ways this prayer of Paul's encourages us to seek the knowledge of God.

I. First, Paul's prayer encourages you to seek the knowledge of God because that is what Paul seeks for the Ephesians in this prayer.

- A. Here is the great Apostle, called and sent by God to carry the gospel to the Gentiles.
1. And what is his pre-eminent desire for the congregations that make up the church at Ephesus?
 - How does he summarise his prayer for them?
 - We know that he prayed for the physical health of individuals, and we know that he prayed for the poor and we know that he prayed for those who were in leadership and that he prayed for those who were struggling with sin... that they might be brought to repentance...
 - But when it comes time to summarise his prayer for this great assembly at Ephesus, consisting of many congregations,
 - what does He pray for?
 - He prays that they might know the Lord!
 2. The very fact that this great apostle for whom we have so much respect—
 - The very fact that this apostle who writes inspired scripture tells the Ephesians in inspired scripture that he prays that they will know God...
 - surely ought to inspire us to earnestly seek the knowledge of God.
 - a. Surely it must have had such an effect on the Ephesians!
 - 1) Here was the man that came to their city and faced threats and dangers for their sake in order that he might bring the gospel to them...
 - Here is the man who had spent a couple of years in their region labouring night and day with tears imparting to them the word of God.
 - Here was the man who constantly inquired of their welfare and sent messengers to find out how they were doing...
 - And here is the man who deeply loved the Lord and who was full of wisdom and godliness...
 - 2) And of all the things he might have prayed for concerning them,
 - He prayed that they would know God...
 - To know that such a wise person who loves you so dearly is constantly praying for you, that you would know God,
 - has to have an impact on you!
 - We read Augustine's biography and we learn that he felt that he could never escape from his mother's prayers.
 - She continued to pray earnestly for his conversion and he couldn't ignore her prayers...

- Of course I don't mean to suggest that the only power of prayer is the psychological effect it has on the person being prayed for...
 - No—God answers prayer—He works when His people pray...
 - But that does not exclude the fact that prayer does have a powerful psychological affect on the one who is being prayed for...
 - to know that someone cares about something for your sake...
 - and that night and day they are bringing that thing before God!
 - Even if it is something that didn't seem all that important to you to start with,
 - it becomes important when you see how important it is to the one that loves you more than you love yourself—the one who would literally lay down his life for you!

b. How can you see Paul praying like these for these Ephesians,

- and not conclude—
 - “This knowing God—this must be something very important!
 - This must be something worthy of my time and attention!
 - This is something I need to seek with my whole heart, for myself and for others!”

B. But what is this “knowledge of God” that Paul speaks about?

1. First of all, notice that Paul actually says, “knowledge of Him.”

a. Who is “Him”?

- 1) If you look in the immediate context, Paul was just talking about the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory.”
 - so is he praying that God the Father would grant us knowledge of Himself?
 - Perhaps... it is grammatically possible to understand it that way...
- 2) But if you look in the larger context, you can see in verse 15 that Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus—
 - He says that he is praying because he heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus...
 - and so it is possible that in verse 17, he is talking about Jesus Christ when he speaks about the knowledge of Him.

b. Now I might tell you that Paul surely refers to Jesus Christ here—

- 1) because Christ is the one who reveals the Father to us...

- John tells us that when he calls him the “logos” or the “Word” in the beginning of his gospel...
 - He tells us that no one has ever seen the Father at any time, but that Jesus the Son has made him known to us...
 - And later on when Jesus is talking to Philip in John 14, and Philip says, “Show us the Father and it is enough for us,”
 - Jesus says, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”
- As I have told you before, for all eternity, Jesus will be revealing the Father to us.
 - He has come in human flesh, and he will always have human flesh...
 - And because He does, we will be able to see **Him** and understand **Him** and through **Him** understand God.
 - The cross itself is the greatest revelation that God has ever made to us, and it will stand forever.

TRANS> So when Paul prays that the Ephesians would “know Him”

- I might tell you that I think we can certainly say that he is praying that we would know God by knowing Jesus Christ through whom God is made known to us.
- 2) This is important because some people grow restless with the way God has revealed himself to us...
- They are not content with His revelation in Jesus Christ and they want to pry into things that God has not revealed...
 - They want to know God in ways that are not appropriate for us to know Him...
 - They begin to speculate about Him, the way the ancient Greek philosophers did...
 - and in the end, it only leads to confusion.
 - Paul does not wish for the Ephesians or anybody else to know God in any other way than the way that God has been pleased to reveal himself.
 - He is praying that the Ephesians would know Jesus Christ, and through knowing Him, would know the Father.
- 3) But if you think about it, it really doesn't matter if you think of the pronoun “Him” as referring to Jesus or to the Father as long as you realise

that the proper way to know the Father is through His revelation in the Son...

- If it refers to the Father, it must refer to the Father known through the Son...
- If it refers to the Son, it must refer to the Son who reveals the Father.
 - The outcome is the same—
 - You know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.
 - In His great high priestly prayer, Jesus says that is what eternal life is all about.
 - And that is what Paul prays for!

TRANS> I should also say something about what Paul means by **knowing Him...**

2. The word he uses in verse 17 for **knowledge** is a very strong word...

- With the Greek language in which he wrote,
 - he had a lot of words to chose from when he wanted to speak about knowledge.
- a. The word he chose was *epignwsiv*
 - This is the word *gnwsiv*, with the prefix *epi* so that we get “epignwsiv”
 - 1) The word *gnwsiv* is a word that means “knowledge” and in particular “experiential knowledge.”
 - In other words, it is not just knowing the facts, but understanding them by experience.
 - We actually have this word in a lot of English words...
 - If you go to the doctor with an ache in the your back,
 - what does He do?
 - He begins to examine you and push on this and pull on that and he may take an x-ray so that he can come up with a **diagnosis**.
 - He gains knowledge by running tests so that he can understand what the ache is all about—what is causing it.
 - 2) And when the prefix *epi* is added to *gnwsiv*, it intensifies it so that it comes to mean “a full experiential knowledge,” or “additional experiential knowledge.”

- We might say, “experiential knowledge upon experiential knowledge” of God is what Paul is praying for.
- b. So the knowledge of God that Paul prays for is a knowledge that can say of God, “I know Him.” “I know Him by experience.”
- 1) You know how it is with some people...
 - You will be talking about them and about trouble they are having and your friend will say, “Do you know him?”
 - And you have say,
 - “Well, I’ve known him for a long time, but I can’t say that I really *know* him.”
 - 2) And your friend knows what you mean by that...
 - You mean that you don’t really understand the person, what drives the person, what the person’s fears and desires are, why this person does what he does...
 - You have observed his behaviour, but he has never let you get very close—
 - all you see is the behaviour, but you never learn what is behind the behaviour.
 - You don’t really know him.
 - 3) To illustrate with the Lord,
 - a) A person can see that God sent Jesus to die on the cross...
 - but it is something much more to see that God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to die on the cross.
 - In the one case, its just a raw fact,
 - but in the other, it is a fact that reveals something about the character of God and the purpose of God.
 - b) It is the kind of knowledge you have when God sends affliction into your life, and someone asks you how you can bear it...
 - and you can honestly say,
 - “Because through it all, I have known God.”
 - That is why I willingly bear persecution—because I know God.
 - That is why I live the way I live—because I know God.
 - That is why I have no interest in lying and stealing and cheating—because I know God.

3. And now look at the outcome of this experiential knowledge...
 - a. In verse 18, Paul describes it as being enlightened...
 - as “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.”
 - This language suggests that we are in the darkness until we come to know God in this experiential way.
 - And it is true—we don’t have a clue about even the most basic questions of life...
 - who we are...
 - why we are here...
 - what we are to live for.
 - We are in the darkness until we come to know our Creator.
 - We are groping around in the shadows as walking dead men.
 - We can’t really know ourselves until we know Him.
 - b. But the LORD opens the eyes of all the elect when He calls them...
 - 1) Then they understand and acknowledge that they are here for God alone...
 - That they are His creatures, made in His image, to worship Him and to reflect His glory in this world,
 - showing forth His excellence as they love and serve one another and subdue the earth.
 - They know God be a God worthy of such glory and honour.
 - And of course when they understand this,
 - they realise that they have utterly failed to do His will.
 - That they are worthy of everlasting punishment in Hell.
 - His word that was dead becomes alive to them!
 - The commandments that they had glossed over now come alive and cut them to the heart.
 - Now they know by experience that they have offended a holy God.
 - 2) But this is not all they understand...
 - Their eyes are also opened to behold Christ, the Son of God, who came to earth that He might give His life a ransom for many...

- They may have known that a man that many worship died on the cross and rose again,
 - but when God opens their eyes, they understand that He did it in order to atone for sins!
 - That He came to bear the full penalty of Hell in their place...
 - And that through faith in Him, they are pardoned, reconciled, justified, and adopted!
 - By Him, they come to the Father and receive eternal life.

- c. They know all these things as soon as they are converted...
 - They see the holiness of God, the justice of God, the wisdom of God, the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, the power of God...
 - They come to know Him with a true experiential knowledge—a personal knowledge gained by experience of Him.
 - This is the kind of knowledge that Paul is praying that the Ephesians would have!
 - Look at some of the particular things he mentions in v. 18-19...
 - That they might know the hope of His calling—see something of the life of holiness to which He is bringing them through Christ.
 - what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints—understand something about the glory involved in living in His house forever as a brother to Jesus Christ
 - and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe—understand something about the way God has shaken heaven and earth to bring about their salvation!
 - We will look at all these in detail next week...
 - but for now I just want you to see that the knowledge of God to which Paul refers is a knowledge that knows Him by experience as He is revealed to us in the gospel.
 - That is how God has been pleased to reveal Himself to us—through His saving work in Jesus!
 - That is how He wants to be known by us...
 - As the Holy God of matchless grace who has sent His Son to bring us from the pit of sin into everlasting fellowship with Himself...
 - He wants us to see His greatness by understanding the greatness of His saving work!

TRANS> Child of God, God's purpose for you is that you might know Him...

- That is why Paul prays that the Ephesians would know Him...
- That is why you ought to be encouraged to seek to know God yourself.
 - Knowing Him is the principle thing...
 - **Paul's prayer encourages you to seek the knowledge of God because that is what Paul seeks for the Ephesians in this prayer.**

But now we come to a second was that Paul's prayer encourages us to seek the knowledge of God...

II. Second, Paul's prayer encourages you to seek the knowledge of God because it shows you that there is a whole lot more knowledge of God to be attained.

A. This encouragement comes when you remember that Paul is praying for these Ephesians to know God when they already knew God!

1. Do you remember what stirred him to pray for them in the first place?
 - It was that he heard reports that they have faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints...
 - a. They already knew God and they already knew His salvation!
 - and yet, Paul is praying that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened!
 - that God would reveal Himself to them!
 - He is praying this for them even though they already knew God!
 - b. The obvious inference is that he is praying for an increase in the knowledge of God—for a deeper, fuller, richer understanding of God...
 - Paul knew that there was a whole lot more for them to know about God...
 - They knew Him in a saving way, and that is a lot to know...
 - But there was yet a whole lot more to know of Him...
 - c. It is no surprise with Paul...
 - In Philippians, he tells us that it was his own goal to know God...
 - He speaks almost as if he doesn't know Him...
 - He says, "that I might know Him..."
 - Even this mighty apostle who had been up to the third heaven, and who knew the scriptures so well...

- Even he felt that the most important thing for him was to know God.
 - Is it in wonder, then, that he also prayed this for the Ephesian church?
2. And this is the encouragement to **you** who have come to know God to seek to know Him better...
- a. You are not finished yet!
 - There is a whole lot more for you learn about Him.
 - If you are trusting in Jesus Christ today, you know Him and it is a beautiful thing...
 - But there is a whole lot more for you!
 - b. The point is, do not be satisfied with your present attainments!
 - Be delighted with them—be delighted that God has brought you to where He has...
 - But be assured that there is more—much more—for you to obtain!
- B. Brothers and sisters, one of the most destructive things in the church is self-satisfaction, self-righteousness...
1. A person will say (or at least think),
 - “I’m a Christian—I have eternal life through Jesus Christ—that’s all taken care of—I have all I need.”
 - My friends, with that kind of attitude, is it any wonder that our children grow up in the church and do not know the Lord?
 - They don’t see us going to war with our sin...
 - They don’t see us making fresh and rich discoveries of our God...
 - They don’t see us encouraged in His word and in our experiences of him as those growing in grace...
 - They don’t hear us talking about how we have come to know His grace in our failures...
 - talking about how we have come to know His power in temptation...
 - talking about how we have learned of His sustaining mercy in our trials...
 - The perception is that after conversion, there’s nothing more to attain...
 - God is only needed when you are sick or when you need a better job,
 - or to help people who are really bad—people that aren’t saved yet...

- or maybe even to help us have a happier home...
 - but other than that, there is little to learn of Him.
2. Brothers and sisters, I have heard professing Christians express the honest concern that heaven might be a boring place!
- a. That is someone who is not growing in the knowledge of God!
- That is someone who isn't learning of His glory as they go on...
 - someone who is not realising the hope of their calling more and more...
 - that we are called to be like Him and what it really means to be like Him!
 - someone who is not realising the riches of the glory of His inheritance...
 - that we are going to see His glory forever as sons who live in His very house, and what it really means to see His glory!
 - someone who is not realising the exceeding greatness of the power that is at work in us—
 - someone who has not grasped how God has wrought marvellous things for us, shaking not only the earth, but heaven and earth, for our salvation.
- b. Imagine... bored in heaven!
- The Son of God, who is a much greater being than we are, has delighted in heaven, dwelling in the glory of His Father, for all eternity!
 - To think that a mere creature like us could ever be bored before that same glory when He is not bored is preposterous!
 - Such a concern could only come from one who is not growing and increasing in the knowledge of God.
3. Be careful. See to it that you don't go so far with the Lord and then stop pursuing your relationship with Him...
- a. You have only just begun to discover all there is in your relationship with Him.
- Don't sell yourself short...
 - I am glad if you have come a long way with Christ—that is very good...
 - but its no reason to stop...
 - In fact, if you do stop,

- it calls into question whether you ever really went any distance with Him at all...
 - Those who know Him best are like Paul—
 - Having tasted of Him, they want to know more of Him...
- b. Don't allow yourself to go off in the pursuit of other things and forget that you are to pursue the knowledge of Christ in all that you do...
- 1) Don't fall into the "if only" syndrome...
- Where you say,
 - "If only I had more friends,"
 - You should rather say, "Lord, help me to know you in times of loneliness, and in all the relationships I have."
 - "If only I had more respect,"
 - You should rather say, "Lord, help me to bear shame with patience for your sake and rejoice that I am yours, though I be rejected in this world."
 - "If only I had a little more income."
 - You should rather say, "Give me neither poverty or riches, but give me what is best that I might know you better."
 - "If only I had my health."
 - You should rather say, "Lord, help me to draw near to you in this affliction, and to see your love as I have never seen it before."
 - Remember what I told you a few weeks ago about this?
 - What difference will it make if you are rich or healthy or popular today in a thousand years?
 - The thing that will make a difference is that you knew God.
- 2) You must even beware of stopping short in your pursuit of knowing God to pursue something spiritual...
- a) It is a very subtle thing, but there are those who make scripture reading or scripture memory an end in itself—
- They have memorised so much scripture, but they don't know their God any better for it.

- b) You can do this with evangelism—where you make evangelism a substitute for actually knowing God...
 - Paul spoke about those who preached Christ with false motives... seeking to add to his afflictions.
 - Such persons will even distort the gospel in order to get their numbers up—they begin to market the gospel.
- c) Or you can make holiness or doing good works a substitute for knowing God...
 - Not that we are not pursue both holiness and good works...
 - Those who know God definitely pursue these things...
 - The problem is when you make this your supreme goal instead of knowing God.
 - Instead of being a worshipper of God, you become a worshipper of how holy you have become...like the Pharisees...
 - Or, to use a very different example,
 - I have met very compassionate people who were very proud of their good works and all the compassion they showed,
 - but who hated God.
 - They are compassionate because they feel that God has wronged us by afflicting us in this world.
 - They are going to put right all the injustices of God.

TRANS> So you see that you must beware of stopping short in the pursuit of the knowledge of God...

- Paul's prayer for this for the Ephesians who already knew God ought to encourage you that there is always more for you to know of Him.
 - This is his prayer for the whole community.
- Now let turn to the third encouragement we have from Paul's prayer...

III. Thirdly, Paul's prayer encourages you to seek the knowledge of God because it shows you that greater knowledge of God is His gift.

- A. You might well be discouraged when you are told that the most important thing to pursue is the knowledge of God...
 - You might look at yourself and say,

- “But how can I do it?”
 - “I never seem to make much progress at it.”
1. If you are the kind of person who looks at Paul or somebody like that and instead of being stimulated by his example, you say:
 - “Oh but that’s Paul...”
 - “I’m not Paul!”
 - a. But I ask you, what made Paul to differ?
 - What did Paul himself say it was that made him to differ?
 - He said that it was the grace of God that made him to differ.
 - b. And now for a second question for you...
 - Do you have the same God as Paul?
 - Does Paul think that you (or the Ephesians to whom he wrote) have the same God?
 - Does he think this God is able to work in the Ephesians?
 - And if He is able to work in the Ephesians, if He able to work in you?
 - Then what are you waiting for!
 - Go and pursue the full knowledge of Him!
2. Now someone will say,
 - But doesn’t this depend on the decree of God?
 - Hasn’t He purposed that some should grow more than others?
 - Of course He has!
 - But that’s not your concern.
 - Your concern is what He has promised...
 - And He has promised that if you seek Him, you will find Him!
 - Brothers and sisters, that means that if you will seek Him, you will find Him!
 - His promises are always good.
 - You can’t possibly know His secret decrees...
 - but you can most certainly know that if you seek Him you will find Him because that is what He has promised.

TRANS> And the encouraging thing is that He is pleased to make Himself known to you.

- It is His work!

B. This is clearly seen from Paul's prayer...

1. First, from the simple fact that it is something he prays for!
 - You pray for things that God does.
 - Paul knows that the Ephesians cannot come to know God better unless He makes Himself known to them.
2. Second, Paul shows that the knowledge of God is God's work by referring to it as a gift of God...
 - He says, "That He may **give** to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him."
 - It is not something they have in themselves or something they get from going on a pilgrimage or from another person...
 - The knowledge of God is the gift of God...
3. Third, Paul shows that the knowledge of God is the gift of God because he calls it revelation...
 - a. Revelation is something that comes to you from outside...
 - It is not something you find deep within you...
 - But the knowledge of God comes through the Word of God when the Spirit opens your heart to receive the Word.
 - b. This is a point Paul makes quite clearly to the Corinthians...
 - He explains to them that the only reason we know God is because He reveals Himself to us—otherwise, we would be in the dark...
 - 1 Cor 2:9-12: But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.
4. Fourth, in our text in Ephesians, Paul indicates that the revelation of God to us is the work of the Holy Spirit...
 - a. In verse 17, he speaks of "the spirit of wisdom and revelation."

- The translators debate about whether the word spirit ought to be translated with a capital letter—
 - In other words, is Paul referring to the Holy Spirit or to a disposition of mind.
 - It is a tough decision...
- b. But whatever the case,
- The scriptures everywhere tell us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation...
 - Jesus said that He is the one who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement...
 - He is the Spirit of truth who leads us into all truth...
 - He is the One who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us.
 - He is the One who opens our hearts to understand and believe.

TRANS> So whatever Paul may have meant by “spirit”

- He is definitely talking about that which is the work of the Holy Spirit that is so desperately needed by us if we are to know God.
- c. You can hear the word all day, but has no impact till the Spirit works!
- 1) The miracle is that He causes us to understand!
 - He changes us all over so that we receive the truth of God...
 - so that we know God!
 - So that we are truly convicted as sinners and say “woe is me, for I am undone” and really mean it!
 - So that we see what God’s law really requires and don’t just look at it superficially...
 - So that we see the sacrifice that Christ made and understand how valuable and suitable it is for us
 - 2) In other words, He makes God real!
 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the Spirit is the one who gives us that wisdom that fears the Lord!
 - That fear that recognises all that God is real and that all His promises and all his warnings are real...
 - Paul is not talking about seeking new revelation here...
 - He is talking about knowing God through the things that have already been revealed!

- He is talking about coming to grasp these things as real...to be more fully impacted by them... to be gripped with them...

And you see, brothers and sisters,

- You can't make that happen—
 - But He can!
 - Therefore, there is no reason to be discouraged about pursuing the knowledge of God that Paul prays for here...
 - It is something that God is able to give you and give to your children and to all other believers...
 - Now isn't it time to start praying with Paul that He would do it?
 - What are you waiting for?