

# Knowing God and Being Known by Him

## A knowledge that does *not* save

Scripture describes "knowledge of God" in two ways. In a *factual* sense, we can say that *all* people have a knowledge of God. *All* creation reveals God's glory, and we ourselves bear his "image" (Genesis 1:26). Because of this, we have an innate knowledge of at least *something* about God, his power and nature. (Even "atheists" do.) But by nature, we *suppress* this knowledge; and in doing so, we bring God's wrath upon us.

- Why do people *deserve* God's wrath? What did they *know*, but suppress? Romans 1:18-23
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- What else do people know? Yet how do they respond to that knowledge? (Note also that this verse comes immediately after a list of some of the sins that people willingly choose to commit.) Romans 1:32
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- Even without the Bible, what do their consciences tell them? Romans 2:14-15
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Because of this, we all know that we are under God's judgment, and that *we deserve it* - even though we may try to ignore or suppress our knowledge of it.

This knowledge *about* God does not - and *cannot* - save us. Having rebelled against God, this knowledge only *condemns* us. In fact, Scripture describes this lost condition as one of *not knowing* God (Galatians 4:8, etc.). We could also describe it as not having a "*saving* knowledge" of God.

## Knowledge that saves

We need more than just a knowledge *about* God. We need a "knowing" that involves a personal relationship with God. This is available *only* through accepting what God has said to us (the message of the Bible) and responding to it the way he has commanded. This will result in two changes: First, we will repent - which means we will reject our old ways and choose to live in obedience to his Word. Second, we will trust Jesus Christ to save us and to enable us to do what he commands in his Word. This will become an ongoing way of life, nurtured by an active, two-way communication with him: the Spirit of God teaching us through his Word, and we responding to him with obedience and in prayer.

Unfortunately, Scripture warns us that there will be many fakes - people who have been *deceived* into believing they are saved. They will think that they know God, even though they don't. Making sure we that are *not* one of these deceived people will be the focus of the following sections.

- We may claim to know God, but how can we be sure that our claims are truthful? How do we know we *aren't* self-deceived, and that our claims are nothing more than lies? 1 John 2:3-6
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## Love and obedience

Love also plays an important role in this matter. Note what the following verse says:

- 1 John 4:8 \_\_\_\_\_

But this leads us to another question: How do we know that we *do* have this love, and are not just self-deceived? How do we know that our love is *genuine*?

- 1 John 5:2-3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 John 1:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Note that love and obedience *go together!* But some other things also go together - such as love for other people and love for God.

- 1 John 4:20-21 \_\_\_\_\_

## Being known *by* God

Ultimately, the issue is about being known *by* God, in a special way; for *only* those who are known by God *in this special sense* are saved. This "knowledge" is related to concepts such as "election," "calling," God's "foreknowledge," etc. - things that are commonly associated with *God's sovereignty*. But it is also related to things associated with *human responsibility* - and the two aspects work together. The "sovereignty" aspect guarantees that God's knowledge is *certain* and *unchanging* - not even the devil can undo what God knows! The "responsibility" aspect guarantees that we have a *choice* - and we can know, based on our choice, whether or not we are known by God.

When we look in the Scriptures, we discover that being known *by* God is related to the concepts we examined in the previous sections. This includes both *our* knowing God and *our* loving God - both of which are related to obedience to God! How do the following passages describe it?

- Galatians 4:9a \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Corinthians 8:3 \_\_\_\_\_

*If you want to make sure that God knows you, just make sure that you know (and love) him! Then you will have nothing to worry about. (This is how we can have "assurance of salvation.")*

**Question: What about those people who's claims about knowing God are false?**

- What is the proof that their claims are false? Titus 1:16 \_\_\_\_\_  
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- What will happen to them? 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 \_\_\_\_\_  
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We have already seen what Scripture says about their willingness to *suppress* the truth they know. This judgment is just one of the consequences of such a choice (if they refuse to repent of it).

Many people who *claim* to "know" God will do "religious" things; but they do *not* do the things that Scripture says they *must* do. They will be "religious," but they won't repent, trust God or obey him. What is the last thing they will hear Jesus say to them, at the Day of Justice? (Note also the excuses that some will make.)

- Matthew 7:21-23 \_\_\_\_\_

Though this specific passage focuses on religious leaders, Jesus continues by exhorting us to apply these teachings (and the whole "Sermon on the Mount") to *ourselves*. What are we to do?

- Matthew 7:24-27 \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus also gives a similar warning in a parable, at another time during his ministry on earth:

- Luke 13:23-30 \_\_\_\_\_

**Question: Why do "obedience and love" *always* go with "knowing God and being known by him"?**

Once again, God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together. From the perspective of "sovereignty," God causes certain changes in the heart of the person who, from the perspective of "responsibility," has repented and trusted Jesus for salvation. Since those changes done by God will *always* occur in the heart, so will the changes in values and conduct, which the person must make. We don't have to worry about whether or not God will do *his* part; we can focus on what he has called *us* to do, and *know* (based on his promise) that he will take care of the rest! And then, when we have succeeded in doing what he commands, we can give him the praise and the glory for everything!

In the Old Testament, Israel was given the Law. The people made a "covenant" with God, promising to do what the Law said. But for most of them, those Laws remained a set of "external" regulations that never changed their hearts. Near the end of the Old Testament era, the prophets told Israel that God was going to replace that covenant with a new one - a covenant that would make permanent changes within the individual. This promise was fulfilled by Jesus Christ, and is the "New Covenant" described in the New Testament.

What is the significance of this? For those who know God, his Law is no longer a just an external list of rules. Instead, God has embedded his Law in their hearts, so that they will start wanting to obey them *without* needing a teacher to constantly "preach at them" about it! Note what the following New Testament passage says, which is a quote from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (in Jeremiah 31:31-34).

- Hebrews 8:7-13 \_\_\_\_\_

Though this prophecy was originally spoken to Israel, we who are *not* Israelites can rejoice that it applies to us, as well. (Read the book of Acts, to see how this happened.) It was because Israel rejected the Good News about salvation, that God has offered it to people of *all* nations. This opportunity was anticipated back when God made his first promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3b and Galatians 3:8); but nobody understood how it would happen, until after Jesus' resurrection.

Not only does God put his Law in our hearts, but he also gives us both the *desire* and the *ability* to do what he commands. In Paul's epistle to the Philippians, we read about a command to "work out" our salvation. (This is not the same as "work for" it. Salvation, if it exists, will express itself in what a person *does*.) Those who have God's Law written in their hearts will *delight* to obey that command. All three of these concepts - the desire, the ability, and the "working out" are found in the following passage:

- Philippians 2:12-13 \_\_\_\_\_

Here are three more verses that refer to "delighting" in God's Law. Even before the New Covenant came into existence, this was characteristic of the few who really did follow the God of the Bible:

- Psalm 119:16, 47, 70 \_\_\_\_\_

We who know God - we who have this delight within us - can rejoice in God. We can rejoice in all that God has done in the past, what he is doing now, and what he has promised to do in the future. We now have a "connection" with Christ that can never change - a relationship that is described as being "*in* Christ." Our future - and our ability to *continue* delighting in God's ways - is secure. God has changed us into something *new*, and he has done so for a purpose that will extend throughout all eternity.

- *What* has he done to us? 2 Corinthians 5:17 \_\_\_\_\_

- *Why* has he done this? Ephesians 2:10 \_\_\_\_\_

One last thing: In this life, there *will* be struggles. Be aware of this before it happens. Old habits of sin are not always easy to break. Changing one's values (so that they are in agreement with the Bible) takes time. The apostle Paul also had this struggle. Like him, we can keep turning back to Jesus Christ for renewed strength to "fight the good fight" against the "flesh," our old "sinful nature" that tries to enslave us.

- Paul's struggle - Romans 7:21-25 \_\_\_\_\_

Paul's instructions to Timothy are applicable to us. What do they tell us to do?

- 1 Timothy 6:11-12 \_\_\_\_\_