

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: September 4, 2016
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“TO KNOW CHRIST”
Philippians 3:4b-11

■ {TNIV} **“I want to know Christ,”** Philippians 3:10. Paul says this after years of apostleship, after planting many churches, after already writing much of the New Testament. **“I want to know Christ.”**

It’s true for me, as well. **“I want to know Christ.”**

Sometimes I forget this. Sometimes I do not remember that **“I want to know”** the Lord.

I never deliberately *deny* my desire for Jesus. I never say ‘I don’t want to know him.’

☹ Still, I do get *distracted*. Have you ever been so absorbed in what you were doing that you forgot to eat? Maybe you didn’t even notice your stomach was growling.

It’s like that with my spirit, now and then. I don’t remember that **“I want to know [the Lord].”**

☹ Similarly, there are days when my appetite is *dulled*. Have you ever eaten so much junk food that better food lost its appeal? Maybe you really preferred that bag of chips or convenience store hot dog to a gourmet meal.

Occasionally, it’s like that with my spirit. I don’t always feel a craving **“to know [the Lord].”**

{Phillips; ERV} Nevertheless deep down, in my heart of hearts **“I long to know [Messiah].”** There are even those moments when **“All I want is to know [him].”**

{NET; AMPC} This wanting involves my emotions, yet it transcends them. It is **“My aim,” “[My determined purpose]”** to **“know [Jesus].”**

{AMP; AMPC; Voice} I desire to **“know him [experientially, becoming ... thoroughly acquainted with Him].”** I long to **“[become more deeply and intimately {familiar} with Him].”** **“I want to know him inside and out.”**

You **“want to know Christ”** too, don’t you?! Everyone does. Desiring God is part of being human.

{Ge 1:27} **“God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them.”** For us to be fully ourselves and fulfill our purpose, we must know him who created us **“in his own image.”**

☑ As Pascal put it, there is inside us an **“infinite abyss”** which **“can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself.”**

{Jn 1:1-3} And not God the Father alone, but also the Son. The apostle John declares: **“In the beginning was”** ὁ λογος, **“the Word”** – this is a title for Jesus – **“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”**

{Heb 1:3} Not only so, **“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”** There are many ways to know God a little; but to know him deeply, intimately, the best we possibly can, we must know him by knowing Christ.

“I want to know Christ.” More than that, I need to know him.

We hunger because the Living God created us to feast on the bread of life. We thirst because YHWH designed us to drink the living water. We crave because the LORD made us to partake of his Son.

☆ God made us that way because he loves us. He instilled in us this longing to know him because he longs for deep fellowship with us.

The irony is that many of my self-directed efforts to satisfy my hunger for him have led me away from Jesus. It would be comical, if it did not inflict so much damage!

Remember Pascal’s statement that there is in us **“infinite abyss”** that only **“God himself”** can fill?

☑ He also noted that we try **“in vain to fill”** to that void with **“everything”** except God. That **“everything”** can be anything: from relationships to wealth to pleasure to power, you name it.

Prior to meeting Christ, Saul (who became the apostle Paul) was no exception. He tried to connect with God and fill the abyss with right belief and conduct.

☐ Please turn with me to Philippians 3:4b-11.

■ In verses 4b-5 he asserts: ⁴ **“If others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews...”**

Saul/Paul was **“circumcised on the eighth day.”** He has born the mark of the sacred covenant in his body from the earliest days of his life.

Neither were his parents converts from paganism. They belonged to the Chosen People from birth, for he is **“of the people of Israel.”**

What is more, he is a member **“of the tribe of Benjamin.”** His tribe is specially favored, for they have a venerable spiritual heritage and their territory is home to the Holy City and the Temple of God.

There are Hebrews, and then there are Hebrews. Paul is **“a Hebrew of Hebrews,”** a Hebrew *par excellence*.

But Saul/Paul has never coasted. He has not taken his advantages for granted. He has made the most of his impeccable pedigree.

■ The end of verse 5 through verse 6: ⁵ **“in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.”**

“In regard to the law,” he was **“a Pharisee.”** Every observant Hebrew adheres to the Law of Moses. But as a Pharisee, Saul committed himself to hundreds more oral laws that were designed both to close loopholes in the written Law and to prevent accidental violations.

He answered the call, not only to obey the Law but to teach and urge and compel others to comply, but for the protection of Israel and the glory of YHWH. He was so zealous for the Truth that he **“[persecuted] the church.”**

Anyone who assumes that Saul was a hypocrite is mistaken. He says, without a trace of pretense or

sarcasm: **“as for righteousness based on the law”** I was **“faultless.”**

Saul believed the right things, according to the revelation given in the Old Testament. He did the right things, as commanded by the LORD.

Saul racked up an impressive catalogue of religious achievements. He left no stone unturned, spared no expense, shed blood, sweat, and tears, all to connect with God and fill the abyss.

■ And yet in verse 7 he announces: **“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”**

📖 The Greek word for loss means ‘damage, disadvantage, forfeit.’ It was used in commerce when material goods were damaged or money was lost.

Paul is not proud of his former good works. Neither is he indifferent to them. In his eyes, they are positively harmful.

■ **“What is more,”** verse 8, **“I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.”** And then, **“I consider them garbage...”**

📖 **“I consider them garbage,”** **“I consider them”** σκυβαλα [skúbala]. Σκυβαλα is a vulgar term for **refuse, filth, or excrement**. Paul is literally saying, ‘I deem them to be dung,’ ‘I regard them as crap,’ ‘I judge them to be’ – well, I will not say the word.

Paul is talking about the legacy handed down by his faithful ancestors! He is talking about his knowledge of the Bible! He is talking about his obedience to God’s Law!

☆ Make no mistake, all of these are good things. But **goodness turns bad when our fixation on the good blinds us to that which is essential.**

■ Verses 8-9: **“I consider them σκυβαλα, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteous-ness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”**

It is not just the world, the flesh, and the Devil that prevent people from connecting with God. As often as not it is right belief and right conduct, when we trust in them as our **“own righteousness [under] the law.”**

Doing so shuts us off against the undeserved grace of God. It stops us from receiving his mercy and kindness, poured out for the world in his Son the Messiah.

The more Saul succeeded in his legalistic quest, the worse he failed in relation to God and others. His correct beliefs and good works led him away from the Living God. They became to him as garbage, filth, excrement.

■ Paul lets go of all that and proclaims, verses 10-11: ¹⁰ **“I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”**

{AMP, NET} **“My aim is to know him”**
“[experientially, becoming ... thoroughly

acquainted with Him],” “to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death.”

{Voice, AMPC} “I want to know him *inside and out*.” I long to “[become more deeply and intimately {familiar} with Him].”

“I want to know” Jesus himself, not just Scriptural truths about him.

“I want to know” Jesus personally, not just accepted doctrines about him.

“I want to know” Jesus up close, not from a distance.

“I want to know” Jesus by bonding with him, being united to him with every fiber of my being.

“I want to know” Jesus by living in his presence now, and later by seeing him face-to-face.

“I want to know” Jesus in his meekness and his majesty, his abasement and his exaltation, his suffering and his glory.

When I get distracted or my appetite is dulled, “I want” to want “to know” Jesus. “I want” to want “to know” Jesus more tomorrow than I do today, and even more the day after that.

In Jesus our deepest hunger is satisfied. In Jesus our profoundest thirst is quenched. In Jesus our greatest craving is sated.

“I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so ... attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians 3:4-11 is the word of the Lord.