



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

What's the Point?

John 17:3

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Introduction

1. We begin with three NT episodes, different, but with something significant in common.
 - a. Jesus was engaged in debate by Sadducees who denied the resurrection and argued their point based on a dilemma they thought impossible to solve (Mark 12:18-27).
 - b. In Athens, Paul preached to philosophers, stressing the folly of idolatry and importance of Christ (Acts 17:22-31).
 - c. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul called disciples from the life of lust and depravity typical of so many in the pagan world (1 Thess. 4:5; cf. Rom. 1:18-32).
2. Why did these people fail to see the truth or do right? The answer is the same in each case.
 - a. Sadducees: "Jesus said to them, 'Is this not the reason you are wrong, because *you know* neither the Scriptures *nor* the power of God?'" (Mark 12:24)
 - b. Athens: "For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." (Acts 17:23)
 - c. Regarding pagans: "For this is the will of God, . . . that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the *Gentiles who do not know God* " (1 Thess. 4:3-5; cf. Rom. 1:21).
3. It makes sense. Of course, not knowing God would be the problem. *God* is what the Bible is about, what it most wants to reveal. *God* is the beginning and end of faith.
 - a. The essence of faith is to please God (Heb. 11:6).
 - b. At its most basic, the way to live is to imitate God (Eph. 5:1).
 - c. What he seeks is for us to share the essence of his holy nature (Heb. 12:10).
4. What evidently makes less sense to us is that the outcome of such emphasis should be a quest to know God and deepen that knowledge over time. James Packer identified the problem when he wrote, "Ignorance of God — ignorance both of his ways and of the practice of communion with him — lies at the root of much of the church's weakness today."¹ God is the point. Let's see how consistently the Bible emphasizes that.

¹ James I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 6.

Body

I. Jesus Identified His Purpose.

- A. John 17:3 is instructive because it reveals Jesus' definition of "eternal life."
 - 1. To give life is what he said he came to do (17:2; cf. 10:10).
 - 2. Do we understand "eternal life" as Jesus used the expression in John 17:3?
 - a) How would the average person on the street define "eternal life"? The average churchgoer?
 - b) How would each answer what is involved in gaining eternal life?
 - 3. Jesus said it this way: "And this is eternal life, *that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (John 17:3).
- B. J. B. Phillips's comment illustrates the significance of this point:
 - 1. "[Some] misunderstand the nature of Christianity. It is not to be judged by its success or failure to reform the world which rejects it. . . . It is a revelation of the true way of living, the way to know God, the way to live life of eternal quality, and is not to be regarded as a handy social instrument for reducing juvenile delinquency or the divorce rate."²

II. Evidence of the Theme Throughout Scripture.³

- A. In the Pentateuch and Joshua, we see knowing God language only in Exodus 5:2.
 - 1. The contrast in this verse is between monotheism and polytheism (not atheism) and the implication is that the true LORD should be known.
 - 2. The phrase may not be used often in the first six OT books, but the point of the stories of the patriarchs, Israel's deliverance, and the emphasis on the covenant is that God's aim is for this specially chosen people to come to know him.
- B. In books covering Israel's time in the land, we see the theme repeated.
 - 1. Throughout the judges period, the problem was that Israel did not know God (see Judg. 2:10; 1 Sam. 2:12); Samuel would be different (1 Sam. 3:7).
 - 2. The prophets repeatedly chastened the people for not knowing God and called them back to that standard, as Jeremiah illustrates (e.g., Jer. 2:8; 31:34; cf. Isa. 11:2, 9; Ezek. 38:16; and especially Hosea 2:20; 4:1, 6; 5:4; 6:3, 6; 8:2; 13:4)
 - 3. Proverbs 2:1-7 ties coming to know God to finding true wisdom (see esp. v. 5).
- C. Use of the phrase continues in the New Testament.
 - 1. Paul used it in several significant texts (e.g., Rom. 11:33; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:8; Col. 1:10).
 - 2. It is important in Hebrews; in one place as a citation from the expectation of Jeremiah 31:34 (Heb. 8:11; cf. 10:30).
 - 3. 2 Peter stresses the theme throughout its three chapters (1:2; 2:20; 3:18).
 - 4. 1 John also emphasizes it, with the method for realizing it often expressed in terms of keeping God's commands (2:3-5, 14; 4:2, 6-8; 5:20).

² J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, Paperback Edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1961), 123.

³ I'm selecting from texts where the phrase "knowing God" is used. This survey is representative, not exhaustive.

III. Three Important Observations.

- A. Learning about God (1 John 5:20), even traits often labeled more "negative," is part of the process (cf. Heb. 10:30).
- B. Ethics, lives filled with love, and the keeping of various commands are connected to – leading to and growing out of – to knowing God (1 Cor. 15:34; Col. 2:2; 1 John 2:3-5; 4:2, 6-8).
- C. The goal of our efforts – i.e., the reason we exist – is to increasingly know and help others to know God (Col. 1:10; 2 Cor. 10:5).

Conclusion

1. What's the point? Have you ever thought about why you come to church instead of sleeping in and reading the paper? Why worship? Read the Bible? Give our wealth and time? Teach and encourage one another? Seek chances to teach and encourage others?
2. The Bible and, perhaps more importantly for discipleship, Jesus answers, to know God. That is the point. Only with that goal clearly in front of us can the walk of faith realize its rich, abundant potential. Let's pursue it together.

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