

## KNOWING THE LORD

by William M. Wachtel

We live in the so-called “age of science.” Marvels unknown to our ancestors surround us on every side, and we take them for granted. Men have walked on the moon, a feat some of us only dreamed of as children, when we looked at the full moon and wondered what it would be like to be there! These marvels are the result of the advance of human knowledge, and of course the word “science” itself is merely the English form of the Latin word for “knowledge.” Truly, man’s knowledge has been increasing at an amazing rate in recent decades—doubling every few years, it is said. In fact, it seems that the Bible foretold, in Daniel 12:4, that there would be such an increase of knowledge at “the time of the end.”

With all this increase in what might be called “*factual knowledge*”—a better understanding of how things work and what are the characteristics of our universe and of our environment—it seems to many Christian believers that the most important knowledge of all—that of God, His Son, His Word, and His plan for our lives—is sadly lacking, even among many who profess to follow Him!

The Bible itself gives us some examples from long ago to demonstrate that this is not a new problem. The expression “knowing the Lord” is one that may be used to describe or define the problem that we wish to address. In Judges 2:10, the writer speaks of the generation of Israelites who had gone through the Wilderness with Moses and Joshua, but who had now died. He goes on to describe the following generation as one “who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.” As we look at this statement, it is hard to imagine that the writer is saying that they did not know *about* the LORD or the facts regarding Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and preservation throughout those fateful forty years in the Wilderness of Sinai!

It seems obvious that the Bible is telling us here that the kind of “knowledge” in view is that of personal acquaintanceship, personal relationship. The new generation knew only what they had heard from their parents and grandparents; they had a *second-hand* knowledge of God and His ways, not an intimate, personal familiarity with the One who had been so manifest in the daily experience of their parents and grandparents.

A similar example is found in the history of the child Samuel, taken by his parents to serve in the house of God, under Eli the priest. One night the LORD spoke to the young lad, waking him up. We are told that “Samuel did not yet know the LORD: the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Sam. 3:7). Again, we realize that this cannot mean that Samuel was ignorant of all the *things* of the LORD or the *facts about* Him. He simply as yet did not have any personal experience with the LORD. He did not “know” the LORD for himself. His knowledge was still “second-hand”!

As for Eli's own sons, grown-up and priests themselves, sadly *they* did not know the LORD (1 Sam. 2:12), even though they were trained and active in His service! They as priests had to know all the correct rituals of God's house, the laws regarding the sacrifices and the worship of God. And yet it was possible for them *not to know God Himself!* Their lives of wickedness demonstrated to everyone that they had no personal experience of God or friendship with Him (1 Sam. 2:13-25; 3:11-13).

Many of the Jewish religious leaders at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry were in the same condition. He told them, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though *you do not know him*, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word" (John 8:54,55). These leaders prided themselves on being the guardians of the truth of God, the experts in the Scriptures and their interpretation, and God's authorized spokesmen to the world. But Jesus declared that these men, for all their knowledge, *did not know God!*

The Apostle Paul, when visiting Athens, saw that the city had an altar "to an unknown God" (Acts 17:23). The Athenians were worshiping this God along with their idols, but at least they were honest in admitting their ignorance of Him! Paul used that fact to introduce them to some of the truths about God and His Son. Paul later foretold, however, a less excusable ignorance among some living in the last days, those having "a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). Such would be "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (v.7). The expression "having a form of godliness" seems to imply that they would be professing Christians, church members, and yet would be lacking the vital personal knowledge of God that brings power and life! Even in Paul's own day, there were some in the Corinthian church who were "ignorant of God" (1 Cor. 15:34 NIV) or without "the knowledge of God" (KJV). Since they did not really know God, we can understand how they could say that "there is no resurrection of the dead" (v.12). There may be some professing Christians today who have the same problem!

What are the results of not knowing God, especially among religious people, professing to know Him, but who do not? Jesus warned His followers to expect persecution at the hands of those "who do not know the One who sent me" (John 15:21). The believers would be "put out of the synagogue" by the religious leaders, and even killed, because such leaders "have not known the Father or me" (John 16:1-3).

Even Paul himself, as Saul, was one of these persecutors and leaders; but after he came to know God, through Christ, he wrote that those who are born of the Spirit, who *do* know God, are persecuted by those who have only been born of the flesh (Gal. 4:28,29). Church history is filled with the horror stories of "Christians" persecuting and killing for religious reasons. By such violence, they only proved that they *did not know God*, no matter what they professed to be as members and leaders in the churches!

Another result of not knowing God, especially among those who once did know Him but who forsook Him, is abandoning oneself to all sorts of malicious wickedness, as catalogued by Paul in Romans 1:21-32. It is not simply the errant or sinful lifestyle of those who have never known Him and His ways, but rather the deliberate and willful rebellion of those who have consciously rejected Him so that they may pursue their chosen evil course of life, the road leading to eternal destruction (Matt. 7:13; 2 Thess. 1:9; Isa. 66:24; Mal. 4:1-3).

In happy contrast to this awful picture is the promise of God's Word that someday "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven, and "no longer will a man teach his neighbor. . .saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD" (Jer. 31:34).

In His prayer for His people, Christ said to His Father, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is both the result of knowing God and His Son, and also its very purpose. We must know them now if we are to be saved, but a major reason for being saved is to get to know them even better and more perfectly! When we receive immortality, at the resurrection when Christ returns, we will come to "know even as also [we are] known" (1 Cor. 13:12). Then we shall see "face to face"!

I would like to close this paper with the wonderful privilege that Jeremiah describes (9:23,24), that each of us may enjoy even now—"This is what the LORD says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that *he understands and knows me*, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the LORD."