

March 25, 2012
II Peter 3:17-18 / II Peter 1:3-11 / Ephesians 1:15-17
The Goal of Our Redemption

If I were to ask the average person on the street (believer and unbeliever alike) -- "**What goal did God have in mind for us when He sent Jesus to redeem us?**" Or if I were to ask, "**What did God want for us more than anything else in this life?**" What do you think people would say?

The majority would probably say: Joy / or happiness / or possibly a sense of meaning, purpose and significance. / Others might say: Peace / or freedom from the crushing load of guilt, worry and anxiety. / And still others might say: Love / healing / wholeness / or prosperity.

While yet others (if they were Christian) might say: More than anything else He would want us to experience His salvation / the power and presence of His indwelling Holy Spirit / and life abundant and eternal.

And, surely, each person could find a verse or two to back up all those answers. Yet if I were to say what I think is the most appropriate answer I would have to say: **More than anything else, what God wants for us is to know Him.** And after coming to know Him (through faith in Christ) He wants us to incessantly seek to "**know Him better.**"

As we read in verse 17: "**I keep asking (and he means on a continual, ongoing basis) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.**" It's the desire of Paul's heart for all believers.

Is it the desire of your heart? Is that what you pray for, both for yourself and everyone else here?

You see, in this chapter Paul has told us many things about God. And the reason God has him reveal those things to us -- is not as facts to memorize / or truths to perk our curiosity / or interesting theological dogmas. No. They are given to us to the end (or the goal) that through them we might come to know God better.

Think about it: Why does anyone take the time to tell another person about their childhood / or past experiences / or struggles they've had / or obstacles they've overcome / or things they like or dislike? Is it just to give them facts to try and memorize?

NO! It's because telling others things about ourselves helps that person to know us better. / Self-revelation and self-disclosure creates a bond of intimacy through shared knowledge / and therefore deepens the relationship we have with that person.

And the same is true of God. The things we read in the Bible have been given to us for one primary reason -- to display the GLORY of all that God is -- so that we might see what can't otherwise be seen or understood / and thus come to, **"know Him better."**

In fact, knowing this is one of the keys to why we should never study our Bible without regularly pausing to ask: **"What does this passage tell me about God? What does it tell me about God as our Father / Christ as our Lord, Redeemer and Savior / and the Holy Spirit as our Helper, Counselor, Guide, Friend and Source of power, love and spiritual gifts?"**

Since the purpose of divine revelation is to help us know God better, if we're not asking that question, we're missing the primary reason God gave us the revelation of Himself in the first place!

So, let's look at our passage remembering that Paul is now opening up his heart and expressing his own personal desire that all believers would come to know God better. It's a prayer prayed in regard to the Ephesian believers in particular / but it encompasses the overwhelming desire of Paul's heart for every believer -- you and I included.

So, how do we come to fulfill the primary goal of God in redemption, and get to "know Him better"? And the answer is simple. Before we can ever get to "know Him better," we must **FIRST** come to "know Him" -- which in Scripture, is a synonym for being saved.

In Jesus High Priestly prayer, prayed (as far as we can tell) just hours before His arrest, He prays: "***Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted Him authority over all people, that He might give eternal life to all those you have given Him.***"

Then listen to what He says next: "***Now this IS eternal life, that they may KNOW YOU, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.***"

That's what it means to be 'saved'. It is to KNOW God, and to KNOW Christ, in a saving way -- a way that includes knowledge about Him, but goes much further than that into the experience of a personal spiritual union with God and Christ by faith.

To know Him means to have a saving relationship with Him -- trusting Him and clinging to Him and relying upon Him alone to save us.

And therefore, to know Him better means to deepen the intimacy of that relationship once it's been established by grace, through faith in Jesus.

As Jesus goes on to say in that same High Priestly Prayer: "***I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your Word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them.***" That is, by faith.

That's where it has to start. And I don't know where everyone in this place stands in relation to Jesus. / I do know you know some facts about Jesus. That He was born of a virgin, did many miracles, claimed to be God, and suffered and was put to death for it. / You also know the Bible says He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit.

But according to the NT it's not enough to know those things. It isn't enough to simply know FACTS about Jesus; you must KNOW Jesus. You must believe what He said / and believe in Him as your Saving Lord / and be joined to Him by faith and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Because the question the Bible asks is not, "Do you believe in God?" The Bible assumes that everyone does (except for the fool, who says in his heart, "There is not God"). The opening verse of the Bible is, "In the beginning God..." It doesn't try to get you to believe in Him, it assumes you already do. And even if you do that doesn't save you for as James says: "**You believe in one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and they shudder.**"

No. The question the Bible asks is not: "Do you believe in God," but "Do you believe in Jesus?" / Have you placed your faith in Him? / Do you believe He's the Lord and Son of God who proved Himself to be so by His resurrection from the dead? / Do you believe He came from the Father, as the long-promised Messiah and divine Son of Man sent to save and redeem and bring to faith all that God had given to Him?

That's what the Bible wants to know. Have you put your faith and hope and trust for salvation in Him? / Have you come to know Him by faith / and in your own personal experience.

You can't come to know Him better until you first come to know Him. And you don't know him until you are joined to Him by being born from above (or born again) by the Holy Spirit. Only then can the goal of God in redemption begin to be achieved.

Then **SECONDLY**, once you have come to know God through faith in Christ God's desire for you (expressed in the desire Paul pours out for believers in his prayer) is that you would continue to grow, each and every day, throughout your entire life, to know Him better. Always better, in a fuller and more complete way.

As A. W. Tozer once wrote in his classic book, 'The Pursuit of God':
"The moment the Spirit has quickened us to life in regeneration, our whole being senses its kinship to God and leaps up in joyous recognition. That is the heavenly birth without which we cannot see the kingdom of God [nor enter it]. It is, however, not an end but an inception."

For now begins the glorious pursuit, the heart's happy exploration of the infinite riches of the Godhead. That is where we begin, I say, but where we stop no man has yet discovered, for there is in the awful and mysterious depths of the Triune God neither limit nor end."

And then he says this: "***To have found God and still pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too-easily-satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart.***"

Moses sets the example for us way back in the book of Exodus. He already knew God through his experience with Him at the burning bush / the powerful deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (when he spoke God's warnings and exercised God's power) / and then later on in the wilderness wanderings / and the times of spiritual communion in the Tent of Meeting outside the camp where he met and spoke with the God he had already come to know.

Yet in Ex. 33:13 he asks for a fuller revelation: "***If you are pleased with me,***" he says, "***teach me your ways so that I may know you and continue to find favor with you.***" But you say, "*He already did know Him.*" And you'd be right. Yet that's the whole point: Moses wasn't content to simply know Him, he wanted to "know him better."

And that, my friends, is the desire of ALL who truly know God. They yearn to know Him better. In fact, if you don't yearn to know God better, it must be asked if you could possibly have come to "know Him" in the first place.

Even the apostle Paul (who had spent a good portion of his life serving God) writes from his prison cell in Rome, where he was incarcerated for simply preaching the Gospel: "***Whatever was to my profit I now count as loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of KNOWING Christ Jesus my Lord...***"(Phil. 3:7-8).

Though he already knew Christ, it wasn't enough. Even as an older man, at the end of his life (within 2 years of being beheaded under Nero) getting to know Christ better was still the all-consuming passion of his life (and surely at least one of the reasons he prayed the same would be true for us).

So how get to know God better? Paul tells us when he prays that the "***Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.***"

In other words, if we are going to get to know God better, we must pray that

God would be pleased to reveal Himself to us. For if God chooses not to reveal Himself to us, we cannot know Him.

Jesus pointed this out in the Gospel's many times. When Peter declared, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,**" what was Jesus response? Did he say, "Good job Peter! You've been reading your Bible and you finally put two and two together."

Is it something Peter figured out on his own or with the help of others? No. For as Jesus quickly points out: "**Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was NOT revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.**" Peter was blessed, because he couldn't know that (in that deep inward way) unless God had revealed it to him.

Or take Matt. 11 where people are seeing Jesus miracles, but still not believing. What does Jesus say? "**I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.**"

And then he says: "**All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.**"

What does He mean? You can have all the book learning you want (even Bible learning) / and strive like some philosopher to reason your way to God / or use your intellect to try and pull back the curtain that hides the invisible One from our gaze / but in the end it will do you no good whatsoever unless God Himself chooses (or is pleased) to reveal himself to you.

To know God better demands that God reveal Himself to us. That's why Paul prays for God to, "**give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.**" Because if God doesn't give the Spirit to reveal it to us we will never know Him.

You see, I can TRY to explain to an unbeliever what it means to be "born again" until I'm blue in the face. Yet after I've exhausted every descriptive phrase and illustration known to man, that person will still leave not truly knowing what I

mean. Because only God Himself can make it known to them. / He Himself must reveal it to them. / In fact, to truly understand it, they must experience it! And they can only experience it, says Jesus, if God is pleased to bless them with it.

"The wind blows wherever it pleases," says Jesus. **"You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."**

We can study all we want (and we should)! / We can listen and try to learn as much as we can from God's Word (and we should)! / But when it comes right down to it (as Paul points out in our text for this morning) we must pray that God **"gives us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we might know Him better"** -- or it will never happen.

And not just pray, but pray earnestly seeking a greater revelation of Himself. That's what Jeremiah told the Israelites in Jer. 29:11-13. They knew God. They had the law and the covenant and the promises. Yet he says to them in their exile: **"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans to prosper and not harm you; plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all your heart."**

Ultimately, the granting of the knowledge of God, is up to the sovereign pleasure and prerogative of God. Yet as Jeremiah points out, if that is ever to happen, we must "seek him" or "search for Him" with "all our heart." And the primary way that happens is through seeking prayer driven by a desire to know Him, and after coming to know Him, then know Him better.

"Our religion is nothing," says one man, **"if it isn't a personal and continual discovery of God."**

Thus, we need to pray (and pray earnestly) that the Holy Spirit would give us wisdom, and a greater revelation of who God is. The Greek word for "wisdom" here is **"sophia"** and it refers (as Barclay points out): **"to the deep things of**

God. Paul prays that the Church might be led deeper and deeper into the knowledge of eternal truths... into a deeper wisdom of the eternal things."

And the Greek word for "**revelation**" here is "**apokalypsis**." And it means "**to disclose, make known or expose,**" and refers to a fuller revelation or a fuller knowledge of God. The Spirit must reveal to us what can only be known if He does.

The proverbial light must go on, and the only way it goes on is if the Holy Spirit graciously, and in accord with the sovereign pleasure of God, turns on the switch. / That's what we read in v. 18 where Paul goes on to say:
"I pray also that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened..."

And then **LAST**, what things do we need the Spirit to reveal to us to help us to know God better? And just quickly -- Paul gives us THREE.

1st) To know God better we must pray that He gives us the wisdom and revelation to know Him (in even the most basic way) as a Trinity or Triune in nature. In v. 17 alone Paul speaks of "**the glorious Father,**" and "**the Lord Jesus Christ**" and "**the Spirit of wisdom and revelation**" (or the Holy Spirit). In fact, this entire chapter, from beginning to end, is overtly Trinitarian from v. 1 clear through to verse 23. One has to be blind not to see it.

And thus if we are ever to "**know God better**" (which means to know Him more intimately) we must come to know Him as He is: **One indivisible God in three distinct persons or personalities, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.** It's such a profound mystery that we need "**the Spirit of wisdom and revelation**" to help us grasp it, or we never truly will.

In fact, we'll never know God as He is if we don't come to know Him as triune in nature. Since He is a Trinity, we only come to know Him when we see Him as our **heavenly Father** who loves us dearly. / And as the **Son** -- the Eternal Word and the Saving Son of Man who came to this earth to die for our sins and purchase our pardon. / And as the **Holy Spirit** -- the gift the Father promised / sent by the Son / to raise us from our death in trespasses and sins / give us new life / and be our Source of Strength, Joy, Power, and Love, and lead us into all truth.

Only when we come to know God as Trinity can we truly come to know Him. / And only as we explore all that He is in each of His Persons can we come to know Him better (or more intimately).

Then **2nd)** We come to know God better when we come to realize that God has already given us everything we will ever need. As Paul makes clear in v. 3, we are to praise God, "***because He HAS blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.***"

And the phrase "**HAS blessed us**" is in the aorist tense, referring to a past, completed trans-action, where we have already received "every spiritual blessing."

Peter says the same thing in II Peter 1:3: "***His divine power HAS GIVEN US everything we need for life and godliness.***" We already possess everything we will ever need for life and godliness.

And I stress that because too often (as Christians) we tend to ask God to give us things we already possess! Peter O'Brien puts it well when he says:

"Unlike many contemporary Christians, the apostle does not pray for fresh spiritual blessings [upon these Ephesians], as though he is unaware of the fact that God has graciously given them every privilege in Christ. On the other hand, Paul does not want his readers to become complacent. He does not assume that because everything is theirs in Christ, they do not need to grow in their understanding or experience of these things."

So what are we, like they, to do? The same thing Paul does: Keep praising God that they are already ours / and keep on praying that we may come to know in fuller measure in our life-experience what we've already received.

And **Last)** we come to "know God better" when we live within the community of a gathered fellowship believers and love every single one. Paul thanks God that these Ephesians have a "***love for all the saints***" -- those in their church body and all others. / And for that reason alone the church in Ephesus is a seedbed for spiritual growth.

The word "love" there is "agape" -- a humble, godly, selfless, unconditional, sacrificial, Spirit-given, "looking-for-nothing-in-return" type of love. And what's Paul's point? We grow most fully in our knowledge of God when we love one another.

How does that work? Listen: As you seek to love "all the saints" (everyone in the church) equally and unconditionally, you come to know how God loves, because He loves all His called and justified children, equally. He does not have favorites.

As J. I. Packer points out: "***There are no distinctions of affection in the divine family. We are all loved just as fully as Jesus is loved.***"

He doesn't love me more than you / or you more than me / or Billy Graham more than all of us! In fact, its believing that He does that actually stunts and hinders our ability to know Him better.

And as I seek to love "all the saints" (even those who like me may occasionally be irritable, complaining, hard to get along with, absent-minded, forgetful, petty, unloving, abrasive, stubborn, arrogant, proud and so forth) -- I come to know God better.

Because I get to see the uncanny nature of His love -- which does what I can't even come close to doing -- love all His children equally and unconditionally, even when they're at their worst.

We will never understand God or His love until like Him we seek to love ALL HIS CHILDREN and IN ALL THEIR VARIOUS MOODS and not just when they do what we want.

It's only as we seek to truly love all God's children with and equal love at all times (like He does) that we come to understand and be amazed by the depth and the perfection of His love -- a love we could never know if we didn't seek to love all His children as He does!