

Connecting Minds

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

The Gospel of John

Chapter 17:3

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You..." There are two ways of looking at this statement. One is that Jesus is describing the character of eternal life and the other is that He is describing how we gain eternal life. It is probably right to say that the statement carries a bit of both, but I do believe that it is more the second than the first. Read John 3:19. Here Jesus says "This is condemnation..." and then proceeds to explain why they are condemned - because they love darkness rather than light.

How then does someone gain eternal life? Jesus says it is in knowing God, the true God. We are to know Jesus Christ as the sent One. The Greek word for "know" means an experiential knowing. Jesus doesn't just mean knowing certain facts, but knowing God in experience. God is not merely an intellectual concept, such as the god of the philosophers. God is a person and we are meant to know God personally.

The leaders of Israel certainly "knew" many things about God and Jesus Christ, yet Paul speaks of them not knowing (Romans 10:2). He says they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. This true knowledge is a part of the New Covenant. The promise of the New Covenant is that all shall know God - "For all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them..." (Hebrews 8:11). There is a greater knowledge of God to be gained in the New Covenant without the mediation of priests and prophets.

"The only true God..." Such a qualifier to the knowledge of God is added because there are many false gods who pretend to be much in the eyes of our world. We need to be assured that our God is the only God. And our knowledge of God must be knowledge that is true - we may say that we believe in the God of the Bible but our knowledge must be correct. John

Calvin writes of this qualifier saying “In the first place it is necessary that faith shall distinguish God from the empty imaginations of men... and secondly, deciding that there is nothing defective or imperfect in God, it must be content with Him alone.”¹

You might ask, “What is the cause of all these false gods?” It is surely a lack of the knowledge of the true God. Men and women are born religious and without the knowledge of the only true God they soon fill that void with many gods of their own making.

“And Jesus Christ whom You have sent...” This is really in some ways a continuation of the qualifier of knowing the true God. In order to know the true God, in order to have eternal life, we must know Jesus Christ. But we are also told that the specific way that we are to know Jesus Christ is as the One who has been sent. We need to know Him as our Mediator, as our Saviour sent into the world, as the image of the invisible God walking the dusty pathways of Israel that led to a cross outside Jerusalem. There is no true knowledge of God without equal knowledge of Christ.

To wrap up, there is a certain sense in which the word “know” here is parallel to the word “faith” in many places. To know God is to know certain truths about God, to assent to the truthfulness of these truths and to put your trust in the God you profess to know. But it is interesting to see the order of knowledge Jesus puts before us - knowledge of God comes first before knowledge of Jesus. He surely does this purposefully to emphasize the importance of knowing God as our holy Creator. Without first knowing of a holy, just, righteous Creator and Judge there is little need for a Saviour no matter how beautiful or loving He may be. Sometimes we forget God the Father in our evangelism. We need to remember to preach and teach and witness to the one true God *and* Jesus Christ.

TableTalk

What truths are we to know about Jesus Christ? Read these verses: Matthew 5:17, 18:11, 1 John 3:8 and Mark 10:45.

¹ Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5: John 11-21, John Calvin, pg. 136