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On Knowing the Lord (1971)

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"...That I may know Him..." (Philippians 3:10).

"Have I been so long time with you, and yet thou hast not known Me?" (John 14:9)

"So that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ." (Phil. 1:10).

"And they shall not teach every man his fellow-citizen, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: For all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them" (Heb. 8:11).

"And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things... And as for you, the anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him" (1 John 2:20, 27).

It is of the greatest importance for the Lord's children to recognise fully that, above all other things, His object is that they should know Him. This is the all-governing end of all His dealings with us. This is the greatest of all our needs.

It is the secret of strength, steadfastness, and service. It determines the measure of our usefulness to Him. It was the one passion of the life of the apostle Paul for himself. It was the cause of his unceasing striving for the saints. It is the heart and pivot of the whole letter to the Hebrews. The secret of the life, service, endurance, confidence of the Lord Jesus as Son of Man was the knowledge of the Father.

All these facts need looking at more closely. We begin always with the Lord Jesus as God's representative of the Man after His own mind. In His life on earth there was no part or aspect which did not have its strength and ability rooted in and drawn from His inward knowledge of His Father, God. We must never forget that His was a life of utter dependence upon God, voluntarily accepted. He attributed everything to the Father: word, wisdom, and works. He was God manifest in the flesh; but He had accepted from the human and manward standpoint the limitations and dependence of man so that God might *be* God manifested. There was a subjection here because of which He was able to do nothing of Himself (John 5:19, etc.). The principle of His entire life in every phase and detail was His knowledge of God. He knew the Father in the matter of the words He spoke, the works He did, the men and women with whom He had to do; with regard to the *times* of speaking, acting, going, staying, surrendering, and silence; with regard to the motives, pretensions, professions, enquiries, and suggestions, of men and of Satan. He knew when He might not, and when He might, give His life. Yes, everything here is governed by that inward knowledge of God.

There are numerous evidences in the "Acts" as the practical, and in the Epistles as the doctrinal, revelation of God's mind, that this principle is intended by God to be maintained as the basic law of the life of the Lord's people through this age. This knowledge in the case of the Lord Jesus was the secret of His complete ascendancy and of His absolute authority.

Masters in Israel will seek Him out and the issue which will precipitate their seeking will be that of knowing. "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?" (John 3:10). Nicodemus has come to One Who knows, and whose authority is superior to that of the scribes, not merely in degree but in kind.

Toward the end of the Gospel of John, which especially brings into view this very matter, the words "to know" occur some fifty-five times. Our Lord makes the statement that "this is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him Whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." (John 17:3). This does not mean merely that eternal life is given on the basis of this knowledge. There can be life with very limited knowledge. But life *in fulness* is closely related to that knowledge, and the increasing knowledge of Him manifests itself in increasing life. It works both ways; knowledge unto life and life unto knowledge.

Seeing, then, that the Lord Jesus Himself, as Man, represents man according to God, we are well prepared to see that

The Dominating Objective Of The Divine Dealings With Us

is that we may know the Lord.

This explains all our experiences, trials, sufferings, perplexities, weakness, predicaments, tight corners, bafflings, pressures. While the refining of spirit, the development of the graces, the removing of the dross are all purposes of the fires, yet above and through all is the one object - that we may know the Lord. There is only one way of really getting to know the Lord, and that is experimentally.

Our minds are so often occupied with service and work; we think that doing things for the Lord is the chief object of life. We are concerned about our lifework, our ministry. We think of equipment for it in terms of study and knowledge of *things*. Soul-winning or teaching believers or setting people

to work are so much in the foreground. Bible study and knowledge of the Scriptures, with efficiency in the matter of leading in Christian service as the end in view, are matters of pressing importance with all. All well and good, for these are important matters; but, at the back of everything, the Lord is more concerned about our knowing Him than about anything else. It is very possible to have a wonderful grasp of the Scriptures and a comprehensive and intimate familiarity with doctrine; to stand for cardinal verities of the faith; to be an unceasing worker in Christian service; to have a great devotion to the salvation of men, and yet, alas, to have a very inadequate and limited personal knowledge of God within. So often the Lord has to take away our work that we may discover Him. The ultimate value of everything is not the information which we give, not the soundness of our doctrine, not the amount of work that we do, not the measure of truth that we possess, but just the fact that we know the Lord in a deep and mighty way.

This is the one thing that will remain when all else passes. It is this that will make for the permanence of our ministry after we are gone. While we may help others in many ways and by many means so far as their earthly life is concerned, our *real* service to them is based upon our knowledge of the Lord.

The greatest of the problems of the Christian life is

The Problem Of Guidance.

How much has been said and written upon this subject! The last word for so many is, "Pray about it, commit it to God, do the thing that seems right, and trust God to see that it turns out all right." This to us seems weak and inadequate. We make no claim to ability to lay down the comprehensive and conclusive basis of guidance, but we are strongly of the conviction that it is one thing to get direction for the events, incidents, and contingencies of life, and quite another thing to have an abiding, personal, inward knowledge of the Lord. It is one thing to call upon a friend in emergency or at special times for advice as to a course to be taken; it is another thing to live with that friend so that there is derived a sense of his mind in general that will govern in particular matters.

We want instructions and commands, *the Lord* wants us to have a "mind." "Let this *mind* be in you," "We have the *mind* of Christ." Christ has a consciousness, and by the Holy Spirit He would give and develop that consciousness in us. The inspired statement is that "His anointing teacheth you concerning all things." We are not servants; we are sons. Commands - as such - are for servants; a mind is for sons.

There is an appalling state of things amongst the Lord's people today. So many of them have their life almost entirely in that which is external to themselves - in their counsel and guidance, their sustenance and support, their knowledge, and their means of grace. Personal, inward spiritual intelligence is a very rare thing. No wonder that the enemy has such a successful line in delusions, counterfeits, and false representations. Our greatest safeguard against such will be a deep knowledge of the Lord through discipline.

Immediately it is *things* that we reach out for: e.g., experiences, sensations, "proofs," manifestations, and so on, and we become exposed in a perilous realm where Satan can give a false conversion, a false "baptism of the Spirit" (?) a false evidence and guidance such as is found in spiritism. Then, with the withdrawing of those, he immediately suggests the unpardonable sin. If this suggestion be accepted, the value of the Scriptures and of the Blood is annulled, and the assurance of those

involved is lost; and it may, after all, be all a lie.

To know the Lord in a real way means steadfastness when others are being carried away - steadfastness through times of fiery trial. Those who know the Lord do not put forth their own hand and try to bring things about. Such are full of love and patience, and do not lose their poise when everything seems to be going to pieces. Confidence is an essential and inevitable fruit of this knowledge, and in those who know Him there is a quiet restful strength which speaks of a great depth of life.

To close, let me point out that in Christ "are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden," and the Lord's will for us is to come to an ever-growing realisation and personal appreciation of Him in Whom "all the fulness dwells."

We have only stated facts as to the Lord's will for all His own, and their greatest need.

The absence of this real knowledge of the Lord has proved to be the most tragic factor in the Church's history.

Every fresh uprising of an abnormal condition has disclosed the appalling weakness amongst Christian people because of this lack. Waves of error; the swing of the pendulum to some fresh popular acceptance; a great war with its horrors and many-sided tests of faith; all these have swept away multitudes and left them in spiritual ruin.

These things are ever near at hand, and we have written this message to urge upon the Lord's people to have very definite dealings with Him that He will take every measure with them in order that they might know Him.