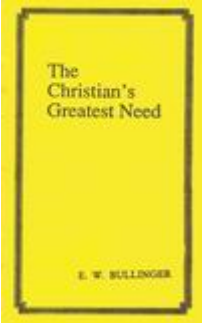
The Christian's Greatest Need

by E.W. Bullinger



There is one thing that the Christian needs more than he needs any other thing. One thing on which all others rest; and on which all others turn. It is certain from the Word of God, and also from our own experience, that "we know not what we should pray for as we ought." But "the Spirit Himself helpeth our infirmities" (Rom. 8:26). He knoweth what we should pray for. He knoweth what we need. He maketh intercession for us and in us. He teacheth us how to pray, and in Eph. 1:17, we have His prayer set forth in these words: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in

"THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM."

This, then, must be our greatest need: A true knowledge of God. If the Holy Spirit thus puts it before all other things, it must be because it is more important than any other thing; yea, than all others put together. This, it is, that lies at the foundation of the Christian Faith; at the threshold of Christian life. It is the essence of all trust.

We cannot trust a person if we do not know him. At least, it is safer for us not to do so; and as a rule we do not. But on the other hand, when we know a person thoroughly well, we cannot help trusting him. No effort to trust is required when we perfectly know a person. The difficulty then is, not to trust. Why, then, do we not thus trust God? Is not the answer clear? It is because we do not know Him! Thus we see how this knowledge of God is our greatest need; the very first step of our Christian course. Our trust will ever be in proportion to our knowledge.

If we knew, for example a billionth part of God's infinite wisdom, we should see our own to be such utter folly, that we should not merely be "willing" for His will, but we should desire it. It would be our greatest happiness for Him to do and arrange all for us. We should say, 'Lord, I am so foolish and ignorant; and I know nothing, and can do nothing; I can see only this present moment; I know nothing of tomorrow. But Thou canst see the end from the beginning. Thy wisdom is infinite, and thy love is infinite; for, our Saviour and Lord could say of us to Thee, as Thy beloved Son--"Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23). Do, then, Thine own will. This is my desire, the desire of my heart. This is what I long for above all things.'

This is far beyond being "willing". We may be willing for a thing, because we cannot help it. It may be even a low for m of Christian fatalism. A Mohammedan may be thus resigned to the will of his god. But what we are speaking of is far, far beyond the modern gospel of holiness; far in advance of merely being "willing". Those who are in the still lower condition; not "willing," but "willing to made willing," do not see that his condition arises from not knowing God; not

knowing how infinite is His love, how vast is His wisdom, how blessed and how sweet is His will. If they did but know something of this, they would yearn for His will. It would be the one great earnest desire and longing of their hearts for Him to do exactly what is pleasing in His own sight, in us, and for us, and through us.

Not knowing this secret, Christians everywhere, are striving and laboring to be "willing" by looking at themselves; and by some definite "act of faith" to do something of themselves. Instead of thinking of His wisdom and His love, they are thinking of themselves and of their "surrender". But this is labor in vain. Even if it should seem to accomplish something, it is only like tying paper flowers on a plant. They may look natural and fair; but they have no scent, and no life; no fruit, and no seed. It is an artificial, fictitious attempt to produce that which, if they did but know God, would come of itself, without an effort: yea, the effort would be to stop or hinder the mighty power of a true knowledge of God.

The trouble with us is, if we prove our hearts to their depth, that, at the bottom, we think we know better. We would not say it for the world; we would hardly admit it to ourselves. But there it is; and the difficulty of being "made willing" is the proof of it. If we really knew Him, and believed that He knows better than we do what is good for us, there would be no effort whatever, but only a blessed irrepressible desire for His will. Before we proceed further to consider some other of the practical effects of this knowledge, let us notice the fact that there are two words in the original for this knowledge of God. Two verbs which mean to know. As these are used sometimes in the very same verse, it is very important that we should carefully distinguish that which the Holy Spirit has so especially emphasized.

There are, indeed, six Greek words which are translated to know, but these two are the most common.

1. The one, *oida*, means to know without learning or effort; and refers to what we know intuitively, or as a matter of fact or history.
2. The other, *ginosko*, means to get to know; by effort, or experience, or learning.

This difference will be clearly seen, if we examine one or two passages:

John 13:7, "What I do thou knowest not now." This is the former of these two words, and tells us that Peter had no intuitive knowledge of what the Lord was doing; and had no means of knowing. It was impossible. The Lord, however, goes on to say, "but thou shalt know (i.e. get to know) hereafter." Peter would learn, and find out, by experience and revelation, what the Lord was then doing.

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John 8:55. "Ye have not know him (i.e., gotten to know him. No. 2 of these two words); but I know him (No. 1) him not, I shall be a liar like unto you; but I know him (No. 1)." Here the Lord declares His imminent knowledge of the Father; and declares that hose whom He was addressing, not only had no such innate knowledge of God, but had not even attained to that knowledge.

1 John 5:20. "We know (No. 1, i.e., we know as a historical fact, without learning it) that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know (i.e., get to know, No. 2) him that is true."

Here the truth is taught that, before any one can get to know God, he must have a spiritual understanding imparted to him. With this agrees 1 Cor. 2:14. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he get to know them." Why not? Because "they are spiritually discerned." The natural man has no means of getting to know spiritual things. A spiritual understanding must first be "given" to him. Then he is able not only to discern, but to love and delight in the revelation of spiritual things, and to get to know Him, "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." "This is life eternal" (John 17:3).

The importance of getting to know God is thus again wondrously emphasized as our one great need. This knowledge is not only the basis of trust in God; not only the foundation of Christian faith; but of Christian life. Practical life and walk will be in direct proportion to our knowledge of God. Look at Col. 1:9,10, where we have the practical outcome of the prayer in Eph. 1:17. In Eph. 1:17 we have the prayer itself. In Col. 1:9,10, we have it applied for our correction and instruction. Carefully weigh the words. "For this cause, we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire" --- Desire what? "that ye might be filled with the knowledge (the noun from No. 2, i.e., acquired knowledge) of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Why? For what purpose? To what end? "THAT YE MAY WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD UNTO ALL PLEASING, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD."

Then, to walk worthy of the Lord, I must know Him? Exactly so. If I would please Him in all things I must know how to please Him. Is this all that is required? All that I have to do? Yes, this is all. Then I have not to rush hither and thither; from Convention to Convention? No, I have to sit down before God's Word, and get to know Him through that. There is no other way of getting to know Him. And He has given us His Word, and revealed Himself therein, on purpose that we may study it and find out what it is that pleases Him; what it is He loves; what it is He hates; what it is He does. To get to know His wisdom, His will, His infinite love, His almighty power, His faithfulness, His holiness, His righteousness, His truth, His goodness and mercy, His long-suffering, His gentleness, His care, and

all the innumerable attributes of our great and glorious God. See how this knowledge is absolutely necessary, if we would please God.

We cannot please any of our friends unless we know what they are pleased with. If we would make a present to one of them, we naturally think, or try to find out, what it is he or she needs or would be pleased to have. If we are receiving a guest, we naturally try to remember or find out what pleases him in food or drink, in occupation or recreation. If we cannot find this out, then we have to guess at it, and we may or may not succeed in our effort to please. We may take the greatest trouble and pains, and yet, after all, we may arrange for or provide the very thing which is most disliked. It is even so with our God. How are we to find out the things that please Him? How are we to discover the things He approves?

"ONLY FROM HIS WORD."

There, and there alone can we get to know Him. There alone shall we learn the fullness of the Spirit's prayer for us in Eph. 1:7; and the blessed practical outcome of it in Col. 1:9,10. No man has this knowledge of God intuitively. No minister can even help in imparting it, except in and by the ministry of that Word. His own thoughts are valueless. Only so far as he enables us to understand that Word can he be of any assistance to us. He may be mistaken by himself, and very easily be a hindrance instead of a help. God has revealed Himself in His written Word, the Scriptures of truth; and in the Living Word, His Son, Jesus Christ. And it is by the Communicated Word revealed in our hearts by the Holy Ghost that we begin thus to get to know Him, whom to know is Life Eternal.

This is the one great reason why the written Word is given to us. It is not given merely as a book of general information, or of reference; but it is given to make known the invisible God. Why do we read it? Why do we open it at all? What is, or ought to be, our object in reading it? Do we read a portion that someone else has selected for us? Do we read that portion because we have promised someone we would do so? Or do we open it, and sit down before it with the one dominant object to find out God; to discover His mind; to get to know His will.

Those who are not thus engaged make their own god out of their own thoughts and imaginations. They have to fall back on what they think their god likes! Thousands make their gods with their hands, out of wood, or stone, or bread. Thousands more make him out of their own heads. But, being ignorant of God's Word, they are alike ignorant of the God who has there revealed Himself. See the power of this truth as it is applied to what is called "Public Worship" or "Divine Service". How many will still worship "the unknown God"; and serve themselves; and do what is pleasing in their own eyes, studying only their own tastes! Ignorant of that great rubrick, John 4:24, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him MUST worship Him in spirit and in truth" (i.e., truly in spirit), they talk of the

kind of service they prefer, and say, "I don't like that at all"; or, "I do like that so much"; as though "places of worship," so-called, were opened merely for persons to go in and do what pleases themselves, forgetful of that word "MUST," which dominates the whole sphere of what we call worship.

Worship "must" be only with the spirit. We cannot worship God--who is a Spirit--with our eyes, by looking on at what is being done. We cannot worship God with our noses, by smelling incense, whether ceremonially or otherwise used. We cannot worship God with our ears, by listening to music, however well it may be "rendered". No! Worship cannot be with any of our senses; or by all of them put together. It must be spiritual, and not sensual. The worshippers must be spiritual worshippers, for "the Father seeketh such to worship Him." (John 4:23). How many of such worshippers frequent our churches and chapels? How many are still worshipping "the unknown God" (Acts 17:23)?

Is it possible that, if the true God were known--the great, the High and Holy God, who dwelleth not in temples made with hands; the God who inhabiteth eternity; the God in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, and who chargeth His angels with folly--is it possible, we ask, that nay who know Him could imagine, for one moment, that, He "seeks" or could be pleased with, or accept, or regard a congregation turning the Bible into "a book of the words," and listening, for example, to a girl singing a solo, getting as high a note as she can, and holding it out as long as she can! Is THAT what The Great and Infinite God is seeking? Is that the occupation of the hearth with Himself which He says He "MUST" have? No indeed! and the greater the ignorance of God, the deeper and more degraded will become the accompaniments of what is called "Public Worship".

Consider further, the effect of this great truth on our daily life. What rest and peace it brings. Look at its influence on our prayers. What is prayer for? Why are we told so often to pray? Why? Because prayer is intended to humble us by putting us into the place of helplessness and dependence. Prayer is meant to put us with our faces in the dust before the Mighty God.

Instead of that, what do we find? We turn that place which is meant to humble us and keep us in the low place, into a Throne, from which we dictate to God what He shall do in our affairs, how He shall help to carry out our plans, what He shall do among the governments and political affairs of the world. That is the outcome of the pride of the "old man" within us. So that we, who cannot manage our own affairs, do not hesitate to take on ourselves the management of the universe, and "move the hand that moves the world."

A true knowledge of God would lead to a very different condition of things. Our prayers would be frequent indeed, but we should be so filled with a sense of God's wisdom, and power, and goodness, that we should cease to pray as

though we has more compassion than He had; as though we were more concerned about sins and sinners than He is; as though we were more interested in His work than He is.

We should be "definite" indeed, as well we may be in many things where from His Word, we know "what to ask." But we should be equally "definite" in leaving all our cares with Him. We should cease to take the responsibilities of life upon ourselves. We should say, 'Lord, what Thou wilt! Do not heed my requests it Thou seest they are not good. Do not do or give this or that because I ask it or think it good. Withhold it, if Thou, who seest the end from the beginning, seest it will not be for my good. I am so foolish and ignorant before Thee: and Thou art so wonderful, so wise, and so good: Goodness and mercy itself; and Thy love is so infinite that Thou canst do only what is right, and wisest, and best. Thy will is love itself. Oh that I may be filled with such a knowledge of Thy will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that I may enjoy the perfect rest which that knowledge will give.'

In proportion as we have this knowledge of God and of His will, shall we thus pray without ceasing; and in this manner make known our requests unto Him. When we pray definitely for our will to be done in any matter, it means (if we are honest enough to confess it), that we are willing to take all the responsibility if that request be granted. Oh, what a solemn responsibility! and how unnecessary, when God had provided us with One who is our Surety, and who is responsible for us in life and in death (John 6:39). How much better to leave our affairs in His hands.

When we employ a person to do any labour for us, and we ask him how much we are to pay him? he replies, "I will leave it to you, Sir." Why? Because he knows perfectly well that we shall be very likely to give more than he would dare to ask. It is even so with our God. if we know Him well enough we can surely say, in making our request, "I will leave it to Thee, Lord." We have His assurance that He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). If we do the thinking we shall surely limit Him. How much better to leave the limit to Him: and we shall do this in proportion as we know Him.

Take another illustration. Here is a friend in great difficulties; and we have a plan that will life him right out of them, and set him on his feet again. He, meantime, comes to us and to borrow some small sum that will only give temporary relief, and leave him to struggle on still with his difficulties. He limits our power. His poor thoughts cannot rise to the extent of what we are able to do exceeding abundantly. If we answer his prayer, and grant him his request, and lend him what he asks, how small will be his blessing. Why does he not "ask or think" more "worthy" of our ability and love? Because he does not know us well enough! This is the secret, and that is why he is not delivered. He thinks he

knows better than we do; and measures our willingness to give by his poor power to ask.

Oh to know the love, and power, and wisdom of our God. What a revolution it would make in our prayers, as well as in our lives. But look again at another effect of this knowledge of God as applied to missionary work. What is the work of the missionary? He offers himself and is accepted. He is trained for his service, and he learns the particular language. The moment at length arrives when he is able to speak that language, and the opportunity comes to speak. Now, what is he going to say? What is the first thing that must come from his opened lips? Is it not to explain his God to that heathen man or woman? Is it not to show how far the living God is above all their ideas? is it not to tell how God has revealed Himself in His Word? and to explain that revelation, and to minister that Word.

We thus see how a true knowledge of God lies at the threshold of all missionary work. How can a man explain God unless he knows God? and how can God be known apart from His Word? Hence the supreme necessity of so studying that Work that we may not only enjoy but be able to speak of Him of Whom that Word is sent to testify. So far we have spoken only of a knowledge of God--the Father. But it is also of the greatest importance that we should have a true knowledge of Christ.

This is the Christian's one object, as well as his greatest need. This is set forth with remarkable clearness and force in Phil. 3. In the ninth verse we have our standing in Christ expressed in the words

"FOUND IN HIM."

This is explained as not having our own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ; "the righteousness which is of God by faith." Clothed in this righteousness, nothing of self is seen by God. Like the stones in the Temple, they were covered over first with cedar-wood; and the cedar-wood was covered over with gold. Then it is added, "there was no stone seen." These words are not necessary either for the grammar, or for the sense; for how could the stone be seen if thus doubly covered up? No! the words are graciously added to emphasize the antitype, and to impress upon us the blessed fact that, when covered with Christ's righteousness there is nothing of self seen in our standing before God. We are already "in the heavenlies, in Christ"; and are comely in all His comeliness, perfect in all His perfection, accepted in all His merit, righeous as He is righteousness; yea, holy as He is holy, and loved as He is beloved. All this is included in those words, "found in Him." And being thus "found in Him" for our standing, we have in verses 20, 21 our hope; which, is to be

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"LIKE HIM"

in resurrection and ascension glory at His coming. Hence "we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself." This is our "blessed hope." We have referred to it here, and not in the order in which it stands in this chapter, in order in which it stands in this chapter, in order to show what it is that lies between the two--the beginning and the end of our Christian course. What is that is to fill the place between these two? What is to occupy our hearts from the moment when we were in Christ, who is our life, to the moment when we shall be like Christ, who shall be our glory? What is the one object that is to ever fill our hearts and occupy our minds?

"THAT I MAY KNOW HIM."

This is henceforth the Christian's great object. Nothing but this aim to get to know Christ (for this is the word used here, in Phil. 3:10). As verse 9 contained the explanation of the words "found in him," so this verse (10) contains the explanation of how and why we are to get to know Christ. We are henceforth no longer to know Him after the flesh, but to get to know Him as risen; the head of the New Creation in resurrection (2 Cor. 5:16,17).

For this is how this knowledge is explained: "that I may get to know him and the power of his resurrection." Not to know merely the historical fact of his resurrection, but the "power" of it: i.e., what its wondrous power has done for us. But how can we get to know this "power"? Ah! only by experiencing "the fellowship of His sufferings": by learning that when He, the Head of the Body, suffered, all the members of that Body suffered in mysterious and blessed "fellowship with Him." Thus shall we get to know how we were "made conformable to Him in His death." Only when we have thus learned that we suffered when He suffered, and died when He died, can we begin to learn how we have risen also with Christ; and "get to know the power of His resurrection." How few of us know what this "power" is, as it takes us out of the old creation and sets us in the new creation, where "all things are of God" (2 Cor. 5:17).

This then is our object, to get to know all that Christ is made unto us in resurrection power. How startling must these words have been as they fell upon the ears of Greeks (for this is the first city Paul set his foot in in Europe). They had been brought up on the great motto of Solon, the wisest of the seven wise men of Greece. His motto was supposed by them to embody in itself the essence of all wisdom; and it consisted of only two words, which were carved over the entrance to the schools and colleges of Greece: gnosthe seauton---

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"KNOW THYSELF"

But yet, how foolish are those words. For how can one know anything of himself by considering himself? If he looks at others, then he can see how different he is from them; and how much better or worse he may be than they. But it is only when we compare ourselves with Christ, who is the wisdom and glory of God, that we learn what we really are; and how far short we come of that glory (Rom. 3:23). It is only as we see ourselves in "the Balance of the Sanctuary," or by the side of the plumb-line of that Perfection, that we see, and get to know, our absolutely lost and ruined condition. Hence this new motto was thundered from heaven into the ears of those who sought to know themselves----

"THAT I MAY GET TO KNOW HIM."

Yes; this is our one object. This it is that will have the mighty transforming power over our lives. Every moment spent in seeking to know ourselves is a moment lost: and not only lost, but used to keep us from the one thing that alone can accomplish our object and teach us ourselves. Trying to know ourselves, we not only fail in the attempt, but we cease to learn Christ, which alone teaches us to know ourselves. And yet, how many are spending their lives in this vain search? Running hither and thither to hear this man and that man. And, being constantly directed to this self-examination, they are only led into trouble; or, into a joy which lasts only while the excitement is kept up.

Oh! to be occupied with Christ; to have Him for our object; and His resurrection power for our lives. This we shall have; and have increasingly as we get to know Christ. Again. What was it that led the heathen world into all its darkness, corruption, and sin? Just this: "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of corruptible man" (Rom. 1:22,28).

Like people today who, ignorant of God as He has revealed Himself in His Word, make their god, some with their own hands, or out of their own heads, vainly imagining He is what they think He is, and worshipping, like the heathen, "the unknown God," such an one as themselves. What was it that led Israel astray and brought upon them all their sorrows and sufferings? Isaiah opens with the Divine indictment, which gathers up in the briefest form the one great cause which lay at the root of all:

"The ox knoweth his owner;
And the ass his master's crib;
But Israel doth NOT KNOW,
My People doth not consider."

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See how the Lord Jesus confirms this in Luke 19:42-44, as He weeps over Jerusalem. All is summed up in the opening and closing words:

"IF THOU HADST KNOWN!"

Even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace."
And then, turning to the reason for that judgment, He adds: "Because thou KNEWEST NOT the day of thy visitation." And what is to be the acme of Israel's glory in the day of her restoration? Ah! then it shall come to pass that "they shall no more teach every man his neighbor saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all KNOW ME, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD" (Jer. 31:34). And what shall be Creation's glory: and the peace and joy of the whole earth? This sums up all:

"The earth shall be full of the KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, As the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

And what is the secret of our being able to glory only in the Lord, and to enjoy His blessing in this the day of our visitation? It is given in Jer. 9:23,24:

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
Neither let the mighty man glory in his might,
Let not the rich man glory in his riches:
But let him that glorieth, glory in this,
THAT HE UNDERSTANDETH AND KNOWETH ME."

We are thus brought round, and brought back to the one great duty, which should henceforth absorb our hearts and minds, and fill our days and years; viz., to be instant in our study of the Word of God, which is given to us with the one great, express, commanding purpose--the revelation of Himself, in order that we may

"GET TO KNOW HIM."

Study to shew thyself approved unto God...
2 Timothy 2:15