

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

“THAT I MAY KNOW HIM.”—Phil. iii.

IT appears to me, beloved Christian friends, that with regard to the subject before us, “That I may know Him,” the Holy Ghost, speaking by the Apostle, has no particular reference to the measure of knowledge which is absolutely needful with regard to the salvation of our souls, but a higher, further, more intimate acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ, even as a friend is intimately acquainted with his bosom friend. That this is the meaning, I gather from reading verse 8th in connection with verse 10th “Yea, doubtless, and I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Then what follows up to our portion before us, I judge to be a parenthesis, so that the connection would be—“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,” the parenthesis commencing from these words in the 8th verse: “For whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” This parenthesis, it appears to me, refers to that which he has attained to already as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to which multitudes of the dear children of God have attained, but with which they should not be satisfied, but aim after greater attainments than these, even that they should know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.

The question arises naturally, What is it that the Apostle particularly desires in our text, “That I may know Him?” That he might know the Blessed One in all His loveliness, in all His beauty, just as the saints finally will see the King in His beauty, will know Him in all His loveliness, in all His characters, so as every one of His saints will know Him in the glory finally, so, while, the Apostle was yet in the body, whilst yet in weakness, whilst yet Satan was not bound, and himself not in the glory, he desired more and more intimately to become acquainted with the precious adorable Lord Jesus Christ in all His loveliness, so that the joy and the blessedness of the glory in the world to come might, in a great measure, already be realised by him while he was yet in the body.

PRACTICAL RESULTS OF KNOWING CHRIST.

What would be the result of this intimate knowledge of the adorable Lord to which the Apostle refers here? Evidently it would be increased conformity to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the word of the Apostle John: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is,” (or know Him as He is). So knowing the Lord Jesus Christ perfectly, knowing Him in all His loveliness, seeing the King in His beauty, they will be made like Him. Now in the measure in which we, the children of God, while yet we are upon earth, know the Lord in all His beauty, in all His loveliness, in all His characters, we shall be conformed to the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ. And on this account, this knowledge here referred to by the Holy Ghost, through the Apostle, is of such immense value. And we should not say, “I know him for the salvation of my soul. I shall at last be saved through Him.” God be praised if we know the Lord sufficiently with regard to the salvation of our soul; but this is not the ultimate object regarding us, but the glory of His name, and our increasing conformity to the mind of the Lord while yet here on earth; and in order to bring this about, increased intimate acquaintance with the precious Lord Jesus Christ is to be sought after, so that one ought not to be satisfied with the measure of attainment regarding the knowledge of Christ to which he has been brought already. This is the first point then to which I desire to direct your attention, namely, that, with increased knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, there would be found in us increased conformity to the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another point that would be attained is increased spiritual power, increased comfort, increased strength in every way. I refer you, as proof of this, to the 4th verse of the 50th of Isaiah. Isaiah, you know, speaks here about the Lord Jesus Christ. There the Blessed One Himself stated for the comfort and the encouragement of His Church, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” Therefore, the great point is to be able to treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a bosom friend, to be able to go to Him and say “My precious Lord, speak to me the word in season,” when we are weary. Whilst passing through this vale of tears, in the midst of trial and difficulty, in the midst of labour and sadness, in the midst of sore temptation, in the midst of conflict of greater or less degree, again, and again, and again, the child of God, who desires to walk in the ways of the Lord, will find himself spiritually worn. Now then go to the precious Lord and say, “My Lord, speak to me the word in season, for I am weary.”

These happy conference meetings are not so much for theological discussion as for spiritual encouragement. I ask, therefore, my brethren and sisters in

Christ, how much do you know of this? Are you in the habit of going to the Lord Jesus Christ and saying, “My Lord, speak to Thy servant the word in season, for I am weary.” I tell you as one who has known the Lord Jesus fifty years and eight months; again and again, and again, have I thus come to the Lord and said, “Lord speak a word in season to thy servant who is weary.” And what have I found? Invariably this—I bear the testimony to the honour of my precious Lord—invariably this, He hath spoken to me the word in season when I have been weary. And let my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ but try the way. Seek to prove the blessed Lord Jesus in this way, and they will find how ready that Blessed One is to speak to them the word in season when they are weary. These are not merely religious statements, but fit to be treasured up in our hearts and to be known experimentally. But if you find it thus, oh the blessedness of that state of heart to have a friend ready at all times and under all circumstances to speak to you the word in season when you are weary! Oh, the blessedness of this indescribable, and if any of my friends have not known this preciousness, let me entreat them not to give themselves rest till they know the Lord Jesus Christ as a bosom friend!

But this is not all. Another result that would follow is this. Thus becoming increasingly acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ, we should finally get into the state to which we find reference made in Psalm ix. 10th verse: “They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee.” And therefore we say, knowing Him they confide in Him, they trust in His power, they trust in His love, they trust in His wisdom, they trust in Him at all times and under all circumstances. How blessed such a state of heart would be! The world without looks on and wants to know if our religion is more than a mere difference of creed between themselves and us, to know how much we have of the reality of the things of God. Now if they find a man or a woman able at all times, under all circumstances, because they have a bosom friend in heaven, Almighty and infinitely wise, who loves them at all times, and under all circumstances, who will ever help and succour and bless them, and therefore they are able to confide in Him, to look to Him, to trust in Him, to be quiet, to be calm, and at peace, whatever the circumstances, and to be able to say: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;” then can the world surrounding us look on and see the blessedness and the reality of the things of God. And on this account it is of such vast moment not to be satisfied with knowing enough of the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of the soul, but to seek intimately to become acquainted with Him, to know Him as a friend knows His bosom friend, and thus wholly to trust in Him. This blessedness I may tell you I have found in all the varying conditions of life. Oh! try Him, try Him, try Him! You will find how well it is to confide in Him, and

how well you may confide in Him, and He will help you and never leave you nor forsake you.

Another, and the last reason why all this is so deeply important that we should seek increasingly to become acquainted with the Lord Jesus is this. All of you, my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, know that we are in fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, that we are in co-participation with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, that means in partnership with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Now does not every one see how deeply important it is to know who our partner is, to know the riches of the partner, to know the means of one's partner, to know the disposition of the partner, to know the ability of the partner, to seek increasingly to acquaint ourselves with them regarding whom God in the riches of His grace declares that we are in fellowship, in co-participation, in partnership with, the Father and the Son? How wondrous the condescension of that Blessed One to vile, worthless, wretched beings like us. While yet in weakness and yet exposed to the powers of darkness, and a pilgrim here on earth passing through this vale of tears, how important that I should be able to go without fear to Him, the good and gracious, and ever generous partner, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is infinitely rich and wise, and who loves me with an eternal and unchangeable love.

HOW TO ATTAIN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

But some may say, "All this is most precious, but how may I attain unto it?" Of course, in the first place, we must have passed sentence on ourselves, must have condemned ourselves, and put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls. Without this there can be no such thing as attaining to this more intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is absolutely needful. But as I stated at the beginning, it appears to me there is referred to here a higher degree of acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ, more than that which is necessary for the salvation of our souls, in order that we may glorify God, live as becomes the children of God, and bear fruit abundantly, sixty-fold, and a hundred-fold. I just mention here, and have my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ ever thought of it, that we are not to be satisfied with bearing fruit thirty-fold, but actually fortyfold, forty-five-fold, fiftyfold; to press on; yea, if it might be, to attain to bearing sixty-five-fold, and if any of us have attained to this, then to aim at attaining seventy-fold, seventy-fivefold, eighty-fold; yea, to be satisfied short of nothing than to aim at one-hundred-fold. When the blessed Lord Jesus Christ brings this statement before us, He means what He says, that some bear in one and some in another degree. And why should we not advance

to bear the higher and more glorious degrees, till the glorious consummation of one-hundredfold? We should never lose sight of the fact that the salvation of our soul is not the ultimate object that God has, but the glory of His name is intimately connected with our bearing fruit. Let us not think, that because we have now for a few years in some little measure left the world that we may take our ease, and now go on more quietly, but to press on, to press on, to press on, and to set before us nothing short of the prize, to bear a hundred-fold.

Let us take the text in its connection. How may I attain to this intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? In the 8th verse we read, “And I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,” “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.” Everything he desired to put aside and renounce, in order that he might know Him, and that increasingly he might become acquainted with Him. Therefore, beloved friends, the pleasures of this world are to be put aside—the fashion of this world to be laid down at the feet of Jesus, the riches of this world, the honour of this world, and all that the natural mind craves after, desires, finds gratification in—all to be laid down at the feet of Jesus, in order that we may be able to say with the apostle, “Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.” So that we have for the remainder of our life but one single object. Not six, not five, not three, not two, but one single object—to live for God.