

THE SECRET OF HIS PURPOSE .... THE PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES  
**TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN THE KING,**  
EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH,  
**IN JESUS....**

By – Stuart H. Pouliot

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***Knowing Jesus—Paul's Living Example***

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Those who conquer through the life of Christ are those who know Him and continually seek to know Him, the very love of their life. Do you see Him as the love of your life? If the answer is yes, then you are one who must know Him, for if we love someone we want to be with that person and know that one more personally. As discussed later, knowing our Lord does not come through romanticizing about the Lord, as if acting like some star-struck bride, but through the experiences of life and quite often through the sufferings of life.

Paul was most surely a conqueror who suffered much. At least among men, he is our example to follow. He sought to know his Master and Lord, and he did as he pressed on toward the goal.

Now, most of us have not had and, most likely, will never have as dramatic an experience as Paul had on the road to Damascus. Paul's experience, as well as his whole life experience, was unique and for a very specific purpose. A light out of heaven appeared to Paul, and the light of the world, the risen, glorified Messiah of Israel spoke to him, commissioning him to take a specific evangel to the nations.

And He said to me, 'Go! For I shall be delegating you afar to the nations.' (Acts 22:21 CLV)

"But rise and stand on your feet, for I was seen by you for this, to fix upon you before for a deputy and a witness both of what you have perceived and that in which I will be seen by you, extricating you from the people and from the nations, to whom I am commissioning you, to open their eyes, to turn them about from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, for them to get a pardon of sins and an allotment among those who have been hallowed by faith that is in Me." (Acts 26:16-18 CLV)

Jesus also appeared to Ananias, as he was instructed to help Paul.

Yet the Lord said to him "Go, for he is a choice instrument of Mine, to bear My name before both the nations and kings, besides the sons of Israel, for I shall be intimating to him how much he must be suffering for My name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16 CLV)

It seems as if suffering followed Paul every day of his life until he was ultimately martyred for the cause of His Savior. Much of his suffering was at the hands of his own countrymen. Of the Jews, five times he received thirty-nine lashes (2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 11:23-28; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). In spite of the conflict and suffering, Paul faithfully testified to the Jews in the area around Judea and Jerusalem, and when he had completed this part of his commission, the Lord directed him to Rome, which meant he had to testify or witness before the nations and kings with what he called *his evangel* (Romans 2:16; 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8). He was entrusted to dispense the evangel to whom the Jews called the *uncircumcision* (Galatians 2:7).

Now the ensuing night, standing by him, the Lord said, "Courage! For as you certify to that which concerns Me in Jerusalem, thus you must testify in Rome also." (Acts 23:11 CLV)

Paul's testimony until his last breath was that the Lord stood with him and would bring him to His *celestial* or *heavenly* kingdom (2 Timothy 4:17-18). His uniqueness among the apostles was not in that he suffered, for all the apostles suffered, and all but John died as martyrs. Paul's uniqueness was three-fold.

*First*, he persecuted the ecclesia of God.

*Second*, he met Jesus after He had risen and was glorified. He never knew Jesus as He walked the earth in His humiliation. (I wonder if he passed by Jesus at some point.)

*Third*, he was given an evangel, which speaks of a *celestial* or heavenly calling. Paul's entire vision was heavenly and spiritual, which is why he encouraged the saints to seek that which is above, where the king is, and to be disposed to that which is above, not to that on the earth. Why? Because you have died with Jesus and your life is now hid together with Him in God. We are seated together among the celestials in the Son, who is our life, and one day we will be manifested with Him in glory—celestial glory (see 1 Corinthians 15:42-49; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1-4). There was little of the earth in Paul's vision. But please do not take this to mean Paul abandoned the earth and those on it. A proper understanding of the so-called (misnamed) *rapture* of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is not about going to heaven but about escorting Jesus, the King of the earth, to earth. The point is—Paul's heavenly—mindedness was about heaven coming to earth, not His people dying and going to heaven.

This might seem to be contradictory from the last sentence, but bear with me. This article takes up the matter of Paul knowing the heavenly man from heaven, not the earthly Jesus. The fact of the matter is that all that Paul knew of the Lord came from direct contact with Him out of heaven and what he had gleaned from the Hebrew scriptures. Over a period of fourteen years (Galatians 2:1), undoubtedly, Paul searched the sacred text to see Israel's Messiah as unveiled through the prophets. His eyes were opened to see that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel, but one thing he could not glean from scripture was the character of the one who appeared to him as a blinding light out of heaven.

Today, we have the full text of the Greek scriptures, which we call the *new testament*. We can read the gospels and see something of the nature and character of our Lord. Paul had no such luxury. It is easy for us to lose sight of the fact that Paul did not have access to the four gospels. The fact of the matter is that Paul wrote some of his epistles, if not most of them, either before or in the same period the gospels were penned under the inspiration of the holy spirit. Scholars do not date all the writings of the new testament in the same way, so we cannot be sure of all the dates. Yet, it is generally accepted that the epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Thessalonians were written before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Some commentators believe that the four gospels might have been written after even the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. If this is true, then Paul did not receive his understanding through the gospels that we read today; consequently, he did not know Jesus as presented in these writings. His entire knowledge of Jesus had to have come by other means.

For Paul, knowing Jesus started with a tremendous truth, one that perhaps we have taken for granted or not fully understood its import. The truth is *in Christ*.

### **Christ Lives in Me**

Paul saw himself *in Christ*, and he saw Christ *in him*.

I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me.... (Galatians 2:20 DNT)

Spiritually speaking, apart from the resurrected Jesus, Paul was a dead man. At the cross of Calvary, Paul died with Christ, and for this reason Paul declared that he no longer lived. He was *in Christ* when He died and when He rose from the grave. How else can a dead man live unless he is given a new life? Consequently, the only way that he had life was by the Messiah living *in him*. It had to be His life. No longer *I live, but the king lives in me!*

This sort of thing was not revealed to the Hebrew prophets and would have been unheard of to any devout Jew. Paul never asked Jesus to come into him and take up residence, as so many today are told to ask Jesus to do. No; when Jesus broke into his life, by His spirit, He took up residence in Paul.

By extension, when we first believed, the same thing occurred in our life, not because we asked Him to come into our life but because it is the only way we are saved (1 Corinthians 15:2), are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15), and will be saved (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Of course, there is another side to this truth of *Christ lives in me*, and that is, the life we live once we are given the faith to believe is a life not lived for our self but for Christ. It is no longer to be a life based on "I" but on "Christ." It is to be *Christ-centered* and *Christ* all-encompassing.

Paul had only one perspective on life and, we could say, only one passion—*Christ Jesus!* He had no life apart from Yeshua, and he had only one passion in life—*Jesus!*

### **To be Living is Christ**

In this respect, Paul's heart was most clearly expressed in his very personal letter to the Philippians, in which he declared: *For to me to be living is Christ, and to be dying, gain, or For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21 CLV/NASB).

The only life worth living is a life *for* Christ and a life *in* Christ. But it is even more than this, for life itself *is* Christ. Do you see the difference? Life to Paul was King Jesus; there was no other life. Paul knew the one who is the resurrection and the life!

Paul's passion for the Lord Jesus was so intense that no matter what he did, he desired gain for his Master. If he lived, it would be gain to Christ, and if he died for the cause of Christ, it would be gain to Christ. In my opinion, many people misread Paul's heart in these words. They think that his gain was for himself if he died a martyr. Surely, dying as a martyr for the Lord has gain to it, but this is not what Paul meant. The gain was to Jesus alone. Paul was seeking gain for the king

in his life or in his death. He was hard-pressed to choose between the two options. However, there was something very much better than living or dying for Christ.

(Yet I am being pressed out of the two, having a yearning for the solution and to be together with Christ, for it, rather, is much better.) (Philippians 1:23 CLV)

Paul desired to be with the Lord in glory. This was very much better than either of the options of living or dying. I don't think Paul was establishing some new doctrine about "dying and going to heaven." He was simply sharing his heart's desire—reinforcing what he had written to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians regarding the resurrection from among the dead. The *out*-resurrection was the very much better way. Paul stated his very much better way later in this same epistle: *If somehow, I should be attaining to the [out] resurrection that is out from among the dead* (Philippians 3:11 CLV [WAET]). He saw our adoption as sons (sonship) coming through the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23), and this requires a future bodily resurrection, at which time we are transformed as we are fully conformed to the image of the Son of God (Philippians 3:20-21). Christ's way out of death was through resurrection, and so it must be for His body as well. I don't see that Paul veered off this path and made everything so spiritual that the physical has no part to play in the future. Such a view is very platonic. Just as heaven and earth are destined to come together, so are the spiritual and the physical. Another way to state this is that the spiritual will have physicality.

### **To gain Him; To be found in Him**

The point is that while Paul was alive, he had only one passion—*Christ*. Again, this is most clearly seen in his epistle to the Philippians.

But things which were gain to me, these I have deemed a forfeit because of Christ. But, to be sure, I am also deeming all to be a forfeit because of the superiority of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, because of Whom I forfeited all, and am deeming it to be refuse, that I should be gaining Christ, and may be found in Him, not having my righteousness, which is of law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is from God for faith: to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, conforming to His death.... (Philippians 3:7-10 CLV)

Paul was willing to cast aside all that was of value to him just so that he could know and gain Christ, and be found in Him, even to the point of sharing in the sufferings of Jesus and being conformed to His death. What a passion!

How many of us are willing to follow this path to glory? Paul told the saints to be imitators of him, walking as he walked and passionately pursuing the Lord Jesus as he passionately pursued Him. For those who desire to make Jesus their passion, Paul is the example to emulate; but it is not Paul that we emulate; it is his example, or we could say, his heart.

Oh, that the spirit of God would lead us to be passionate for Jesus, who is our life! If our only passion is Jesus, then we will have a grand entrance into the celestial kingdom when He comes for His body of conquering saints and they usher Him back to earth. A passion for Christ will lead

us to love the thought of His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). May the eyes of our heart be enlightened and we passionately pursue the love of our life—*Christ Jesus, our Lord*.

Are these mere words to you, or are they life to you? I often wonder if while Paul was dictating his letters, he stopped and said to himself: *I wonder if they will understand the glory of what I am sharing with them. Will they understand just the words and miss the depth of their meaning? Are there other words that the holy spirit would have me use to enlighten their hearts with this revelation that has been given to me?* There must have been some level of frustration on Paul's part or at least some question if he was getting through to the heart of the saints. As a writer trying to explain Paul's epistles, I have a level of frustration myself, always wondering if those who read these words of man will glean the glory of the scriptures.

Paul willingly cast off all that had been gain to him, which was no small thing when we consider his high rank among the sons of Israel. Nevertheless, he forfeited all because he compared what he had known before to what he then knew of Christ, and he determined that the knowledge of Christ was far superior to anything that he had held as a Pharisee. We need to remember that the Pharisees were the leaders of knowledge among the Jews. Essentially, Paul placed all that knowledge in the trash heap once the knowledge of Israel's Messiah came to him.

But it was more than mere knowledge that Paul sought. He sought to gain Christ and to be found in Him. Even after many years of walking with the Lord, Paul desired to gain Him and to be found in Him. We would think that sometime in all those years he would have come to the place of gaining Christ. What was Paul thinking? It is very simple. The more that Paul saw of the risen Jesus, the more he desired to see of Him. The more he gained of Christ, the more he desired to gain of Him. The more he found himself in Christ, the more he desired to be found in Him. In other words, he could not get enough of Christ. Christ was his all-encompassing passion.

We could say that he sought to know the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of Christ; and the more he discovered of the Messiah, the more he realized that the Son of God is inexhaustible. Paul sought for the inexhaustible Yeshua.

Is this your heart? If so, you have the heart of one who is running to win the prize!

### **To Know Him**

Paul not only sought knowledge of Christ, but he also sought to know Him, which is far greater. Is it any wonder why Paul was consumed with Christ and knowing Him? He was astounded that the one he had sought to destroy, forgave him, even wiped away his sins, and then charged him to be the apostle of the nations. Wow! This led him to desire to know the risen, glorified Savior in a very special way.

To know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, conforming to His death, if somehow I should be attaining to the resurrection that is out from among the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11 CLV)

Jesus declared that He is the resurrection and the life. He was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness (Romans 1:4). Paul wanted to know Jesus as the resurrected and ascended one in such a way that his life on earth conformed to the power of His resurrection. Paul sought to attain to the highest state of perfection and holiness that is found only in Him. He wanted to know the very Son of God in this state of perfection, and he was willing to go to the extremes of suffering and even conforming to His death to know the Lord in this way. This was not a death wish. It was a holiness and righteousness wish. God's principle is that life comes from death. There is no other way. But it is not merely life that Paul sought to know in Christ; he sought to know the perfect life of the Son of God, the perfect life we all will know on the other side of resurrection and transfiguration, when we put on immortality as adopted sons of God.

We need to go back to Paul's condition when a light out of heaven appeared to him. He was a persecutor and a murderer of the ecclesia. Surely, as he reflected back on this time, Paul saw himself as the farthest thing from holiness, and his righteousness was as filthy rags. This is why he sought for *the righteousness which is from God for faith* and discarded his righteousness from the law. His righteousness did not work and, in fact, proved to be an utter failure in the light of God's beloved Son. Paul's righteousness produced a murderer and one who made others blaspheme. Is it any wonder that Paul sought to know Jesus—crucified, resurrected, ascended, and glorified?

In understanding Paul's heart in these verses, we see that—on the one hand, Paul wanted to know the Messiah in the power of His resurrection—and on the other hand, he wanted to attain to the *out*-resurrection from among the dead. But Paul saw the way to attain to this resurrection was in seeking to become perfect. Again, this is the heart of one called and chosen (marked out) of God to be a conqueror.

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14 NASB)

Whoever, then, are mature, may be disposed to this, and if in anything you are differently disposed, this also shall God reveal to you. (Philippians 3:15 CLV)

Paul had not attained the resurrection from among the dead; he was still in his earthly tent. Also, he had not been perfected, for which he was laid hold of by Christ. In other words, the risen Messiah laid hold of him for perfection, and Paul sought for this perfection. The only way he could experience this on this side of the resurrection was to know Jesus in the power of His resurrection, and Paul saw that the only way to know Him in this power was through suffering and being conformed to His death. Notice that it is conforming to His death but not necessarily to die. Conforming to His death was Paul's way of saying *not my will but Thy will be done*, which is the same submission to God's will that Jesus had that led Him to the cross.

So, with his desire to know the Lord, Paul pressed on toward the perfection that is in Him as manifested in His resurrection. He had not attained to this perfection, but he forgot all that was in the past, which included his days as a persecutor as well, and he pressed on to what was ahead.

Notice that in verse 15, Paul made reference to those who are mature. Some translations use the word *perfect* but, concordantly speaking, the word *mature* is more accurate. Paul's heart was for *the upbuilding of the body of Christ, unto the end that we should all attain to the unity of the faith and of the realization of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ* (Ephesians 4:12b-13). Paul's heart for the body of Christ was maturity, to be a mature man in Christ, to be truly His complement or image, and this is what he conveyed to the Philippians. Maturity leads to perfection.

### The Upward Call

This leads to my signature verse and the driving force of Paul's entire life.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14 NASB)

The call that was given to Paul to dispense to the nations is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Before the disruption of the world (Ephesians 1:4 CLV), God chose those who will be in the body of Christ and who will be blessed with every spiritual blessing among the celestials *in* Christ and will be seated together among the celestials *in* Christ *in* accord with the purpose of the eons (ages) (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; 3:11). We could say that God birthed them for this very purpose and put them on His path to sonship as a first fruits of all humanity.

The goal for the prize speaks of the glorious destiny of the conquering body of Christ. [As stated elsewhere, I use the term *conquering* not to indicate a special people out from the body of Christ, but to indicate that the body of Christ, in toto, is a conquering body!] The goal is to be conformed to Christ, to be perfected in Christ, to be the complement of Christ, to be glorified as He is glorified. The goal for the prize is *in* Christ, and it *is* Christ. It is the Son in glory.

Let us be clear that this does not come about *in* death but *in* resurrection from among the dead when this mortal must put on immortality—a life beyond death (1 Corinthians 15:53). Paul saw the *out*-resurrection as the prize, for only then would true perfection through immortality be manifested. Paul's upward call is not about going to heaven, as in "dying and going to heaven." It is about rising from among the dead in likeness to Jesus' resurrection and becoming like Him in glory. It is about the redemption of the body, for without a body, we are not the complete human that has been in the heart of God from even before the foundation of the world. Today, we occupy nature-animated bodies—in that day, we will occupy spirit-animated bodies. Obviously, our new creation bodies will be different in great measure; but they, nonetheless, will be bodies. Humanity is not destined to be spirits floating on clouds.

For our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are awaiting a Saviour also, the Lord, Jesus Christ, Who will transfigure the body of our humiliation, to *conform it to the*

*body of His glory*, in accord with the operation which enables Him even to subject all to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21 CLV [italic added])

Whenever Christ, our Life, should be manifested, then you also shall be manifested together with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4 CLV).

Now we are aware that God is working all together for the good of those who are loving God, who are called according to the purpose that, whom He foreknew, He designates beforehand, also, to be conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be Firstborn among many brethren. Now whom He designates beforehand, these He calls also, and whom He calls, these He justifies also; now whom He justifies, these He glorifies also. What, then, shall we declare to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (Romans 8:28-31 CLV)

Let us be clear that this is the upward call. Unfortunately, what many see as their upward call is merely fantasy. Many Christians in our day speak of going to heaven when they die and walking on streets of gold and living in great big mansions in the sky. Scripture does not teach this; it is a tradition of man that robs and distorts the glory that is ours in Jesus. The upward call is about receiving glorified, celestial bodies in the out-resurrection so that we might reign on earth (and in heaven) with King Jesus. Those who attain to the resurrection of the next age, being sons of the resurrection (Luke 20:34-38), are ones who will put off mortality and put on immortality as promised when they believed on Jesus.

This was Paul's passion. But what does this mean to us? What is our passion? How are we to know Christ in this day? Let us consider this last question.

### **Knowing Jesus Today**

Obviously, we are not Paul, and we were not called in the way that he was called nor given the service that he was given. Paul's experience was quite dramatic and unique. However, this does not mean that some do not or will not have a powerful conversion experience. Many drug addicts testify to very powerful encounters with Jesus as their eyes were opened, and they were delivered from the death-trap of drugs. Jews often have very powerful encounters with Jesus. Others have experienced very powerful conversions through circumstances of life. My personal questioning started when I thought I was going to die from a very serious illness that laid me on my back for two weeks and kept me out of work for a month.

Every believer has his or her own story to tell of how they first met Jesus. It is our own personal story, written by God, and all our stories put together speak of the marvelous grace of God *in* Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is good to periodically reflect on the day that Jesus broke into our lives and to reflect on the many changes that have occurred since that day. In looking back, we will see how faithful our Lord has been in keeping us and revealing His love for us.

But how do we come to know the Lord? What does it mean to know the Lord? We cannot expect Jesus to show up and physically walk with us on this earth as He did with His twelve apostles. We cannot expect Jesus to appear as a blinding light that causes us to fall to the ground as Paul experienced—nor can we expect to be like John and be transported *in spirit in the Lord's day*.

After all, visions given to the saints who wrote what we call *scripture*, whether Daniel with his kingdom visions, John with his Patmos vision, or Paul with his heavenly vision, were for the specific purpose of completing the scriptures.

### Through Scripture

It goes without saying that we come to know the Lord through scripture, especially through the revelation given to Paul. He was given this revelation to pass along to us. It is the truth of scripture that opens the eyes of our heart to behold our Lord Jesus, seeing who He is, what He has done, and what He will yet do in heading up all in His life. This comes about by reading scripture, studying it, meditating on it under the leadership of the spirit of God, obeying it when so directed, and walking by faith. As we do this, our understanding of Jesus grows and we come to know His ways and His many attributes. We could say that this is the primary way that our knowledge of the Lord increases and grows.

### Spirit to Spirit

Along with scripture, we come to know our Lord by communing with Him *in spirit in prayer*. Being a believer is not only about holding by faith to facts or the truth as presented in scripture, but it is about a personal relationship with our beloved Lord. It is a spirit to Spirit relationship.

What this looks like, or rather, how it is manifested may vary among believers. Some must have a set time, often called a *quiet time*, to commune and pray, while others commune with the Lord throughout the day as they go about their normal activities. A combination of the two approaches is probably the most healthy and productive type of spiritual life with the Lord. Personally, when I am about my daily activities, I often talk out loud to the Lord. Most times, He does not respond in my spirit; but I know that He is listening and He is keeping every word, and in His time and in His own way He will respond, if a response is needed.

Often during prayer, we receive impressions in our spirit that we attribute to the Lord as speaking to our spiritual heart. However, we must exercise some caution over these impressions, for our minds can give us thoughts that are not from the Lord. We might have such a great desire for something that we think it and say it was the Lord speaking to us when the Lord was never in it. For this reason, we must be cautious and not immediately react to impressions. One safeguard is that the impression must never conflict with scripture as we understand it at the moment. We must remain open that we might not be seeing things clearly or even correctly. The other safeguard is to take the impression to the Lord and inquire as to its source and the Lord's heart on the matter. Sometimes, in fact most times, we simply have to wait on the Lord until, in His time, He reveals His heart on the matter.

Some saints seek for a personal relationship with the Lord that could be described as romantic, as if He were literally standing face to face with them and holding their hand. If this approach draws a saint near to the Lord, then praise God. But the fact of the matter is that He is not physically standing face to face with us in these days, but He is *in spirit*.

I believe we must be real in our understanding of what it means to know Jesus. Another way of stating this is that we must be practical in our expectation and not make it some mystical or overly romanticized or sentimental expectation.

We do not see much, if any, romance in Paul's walk with the Lord. We do get a certain sense of romance in John's walk, the abiding apostle whom the Lord loved and who rested his head on the Lord's bosom. However, even John placed a high premium on the truth (1 John 1:6, 8; 2:4, 21; 3:19; 5:7; 2 John 1:1, 2; 3 John 1:4, 8, 12). According to John, the spirit is the truth, and we are to know the truth, abide in the truth, and walk in the truth. In his gospel, John made fourteen references to the truth, thirteen of which were quoted from Jesus. *You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free* (John 8:32).

The truth is that we know that He first loved us and that we are to love Him, but often this love is overly romanticized, almost like two teenagers becoming infatuated with one another. This is not the love we see in the Lord. What we see is a mature love, a love that causes one to lay down one's life for others, a sacrificial love.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16 NASB)

This is the love we see in our Lord, the love that was manifested through the lives of the apostles, and the love that must be manifested through us for one another. Paul died daily for the ecclesia. One cannot die in this sense apart from the love of the Son. Dying daily is a manifestation of Jesus' love for His body.

This leads to the matter of truth and experience.

### **Truth or Experience?**

Some people debate which comes first, truth or experience. Some say that truth always precedes experience and others say that experience precedes truth. I do not think it matters much which comes first. What matters is if the Lord is in it.

In my own experience, it works both ways. At times, the Lord has led me through an experience that I did not realize at the time was to reveal a spiritual truth to me. Other times, I have seen a particular truth, but it took years before I had an experience that I could equate to the truth.

On the one hand, some truth does not require experience to validate it, and some truth cannot be experienced in this life. The best example is what has already been discussed—a glorified, spirit-animated body in the image of God's Son. Until then, we glory in the expectation of it by holding to it by faith.

On the other hand, experience cannot stand alone. It must relate to the truth of scripture; that is, it cannot contradict or add to truth. It must be validated by scripture; it must never replace it.

For me, the bottom line is that whether it is truth or experience, it must lead us to see and to know our Lord Jesus more clearly and more dearly. In fact, all truth is summed up in Him who is the wisdom and knowledge of God. Of what value is truth or experience if we miss the Lord Jesus in it? Was this not the heart of Paul? Most assuredly, Paul's entire service in the Lord was to sharply focus on the Lord Jesus. As we have seen, Paul's personal longing was not to have just knowledge of Christ Jesus but also to know Him. There is a difference between having knowledge of a person and knowing the person. Knowledge *of* a person comes through facts and figures about the person. This is what could be called *objective truth*. Even the world at large holds some objective truth about who Jesus is, even if it is only that He existed as a real person. Objective truth is something that remains in the mind. But knowing a person comes through experience with the person and it lodges in the heart.

### **Life Experiences**

For me, knowing Jesus my Lord is experiencing His life through life's experiences. We cannot know Him merely through scripture. His life must be experienced. There is no other way, and I am convinced it is God's way. It was meant to be this way. If you study Paul's life, you will see that he experienced the Lord's life as the Anointed One was living in him and through him.

By His life, I mean His attributes or character, such as His love, His grace, His mercy, His power, His patience, His holiness, His sovereignty, His faithfulness, to name a few. These are the things that we come to know about our Lord and experience through our life experiences. Think about it—is this not the way we come to know one another? When we are asked to describe someone, we can do it one of two ways. The first way is to describe the person by his or her physical traits. The second, which is the more personal way, is to describe the character of the person, e.g., the person is loving, cheerful, giving, gracious, kind, faithful, etc.

Obviously, we cannot know the Lord Jesus in this life by what He looks like. One day, we pray soon, we will see Him as He is and marvel at His beauty, and ours as well, for we will be like Him. But until that day, the way we come to know Him is by knowing His character or attributes through experience, as we walk out His life in faith. When we do, we behold the marvelous beauty of His character, which, frankly, is far more important than what He looks like. When Jesus walked this earth, He was not a man of physical beauty, but His very life and character were incomparable to any man that had ever walked or will ever walk this earth.

Dear brethren, we can read all day long about grace and love, to name two of our Lord's most prominent features, and never truly know the grace and love of our Lord. We will be able to intellectually talk about it or even write about it, but it will remain locked in our mind and never reach our heart. However, if we have a life experience in which Jesus' life in us manifests His grace or love in the situation, then it becomes special to us. It becomes part of our story and our knowing Him personally. Once it is in our heart, it will remain there and encourage us in subsequent life experiences. Another way of stating this is that once Jesus gets into our heart in this way, He remains there in this way and He encourages us in subsequent life experiences.

I recall many years ago I was having a very difficult day at work. There were a lot of pressures on me and a lot of conflict in the things going on around me. At the end of the day, as I left work and

was walking to my car, I cried out to the Lord: *Lord, why are these things happening to me; they are so difficult for me.* Without any hesitation, I heard the Lord speak to my heart: *You are going through these things because I love you.* I began rejoicing in the Lord and thanking Him for His love. The trial of that day vanished as my heart melted in the love of Jesus for me. Since that day, I have never doubted the Lord's love for me, most of all when I have been in the most severe trials.

When the Lord impressed on my heart that I was to leave the job that I had held for nineteen years and leave the labor pool altogether, to come out and sit at His feet, it was a major change of life for me and my wife. We were launched out into the deep with the Lord. It was a huge leap of faith for us. What is our testimony looking back over these years? The Lord is faithful!

In 2003, my wife was diagnosed with a very serious illness that was life-threatening. The doctors were not very hopeful. When the doctor informed us of her condition, both of us, simultaneously, were flooded with the peace of the Lord. We were not anxious; we were not fearful; we were not angry. We simply were at peace, and we knew the peace that surpasses all understanding.

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." (John 14:27 NASB)

His peace remained on both of us during subsequent surgery and treatment until she was fully recovered, and healed by the Lord, all to His praise, honor, and glory. His peace over this matter remains to this day. What is our testimony? The Lord is our peace.

Many of the Lord's attributes became personally known to both of us during this trial of our life. We learned of His faithfulness, His peace, His grace, His love, and His glory; all to the praise of God. What is the result? As Job declared: *I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You* (Job 42:5). In like fashion, we declare: *We have read of You in Your word; but now we know You in our heart.*

Now, this leads us back to Paul, for of all the saints in scripture, he stands out as one who sought to know the Lord through his life experiences. Paul is our example and encouragement in this regard. But even more than this, he has left us a tremendous truth that greatly adds to this matter of knowing the Lord. Our life experiences are not separate from the Lord, as if we are on the earth and the Lord is seated in heaven. On the one hand, Paul declared that we are *in* Christ. On the other hand, he declared that Christ is *in* us. To coin a slang expression, our Lord has us "coming and going." Can you imagine anything more secure than you being *in* Christ and Christ being *in* you?

Throughout his epistles, Paul stressed the greatness of being *in* Christ. This is a positional and objective truth that cannot be changed. Once we are *in* Christ by grace through faith, we can never be taken out of this place. It is as secure as the throne of God is secure.

However, Christ *in* you is more than objective truth; it is subjective experience. *Subjective* means that His presence in you is very personal. His presence, or rather, His life is for you to experience.

We are to experience all His attributes in a personal way. Another way of stating this is that His life not only lives in us but also walks us through our life experiences.

### **Suffering**

This leads to the one subject many believers do not want to hear about but which is the most vital and essential way of knowing Christ Jesus. We know Jesus in suffering. I might add that it is through suffering that we truly conquer.

Paul was no exception in this regard, for all the apostles suffered in some fashion, and some of the ecclesias of Paul's day suffered as well. Suffering came through trials and tribulations. The fact of the matter is that Paul encouraged the saints that they must suffer for Christ. Consider the following verses.

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3-5 NASB)

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:16-18 NASB)

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Philippians 1:29-30 NASB)

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3 NASB)

Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5 NASB)

We do not have to seek for suffering; it will come to us as we are in the service of the Lord, pressing on toward the goal for the prize. I believe the sufferings we experience are all in the plan of God—especially suited for us and God's call on our lives.

Suffering is the primary way that we come to know the Lord and experience His character. The reason is because we become the neediest in trials and tribulations. At times, we almost become immobilized as we do not know which way to turn. We know that unless the Lord reveals Himself in the situation, the situation will consume us. Yet, at other times, we might feel so weak and unable to cope and the Lord reveals His character in some way. This was Paul's experience in

regard to His grace with the messenger of satan that taunted him. What did the Lord do? Well, one thing He did not do was remove the thorn in the flesh. Instead, He gave Paul grace to endure it. Did this lead Paul into despondency? Hardly! Paul embraced the grace because it led to perfection.

Jesus said: *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.* Paul responded: *Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Through this thorn, Paul not only came to know the Lord in His grace but also in His power.

Beloved in Christ, do not despise trials and tribulations and the accompanying suffering. Embrace them and seek to know Jesus in the midst of them. Always remember that this is the way to perfection and glory. Do not try to suffer for Him; just seek to know Him and trust Him for whatever comes your way. It is through your life experiences as confirmed in scripture and revealed by the spirit of God that you will know Christ Jesus, your Lord.

Your life experiences are His story of your life, which is what our *History* is all about. Seek to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, conforming to His death, as you press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus! As you do, you will most surely conquer! This is what you have been called to and God knows how to bring you through to His glory.

God is love, and love never fails!