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# 1

## GOD: I WANT TO KNOW YOU!

**H**ow would you answer the question, Where does personal Christianity begin? The average Christian would say that it begins with accepting Christ as Savior and Lord. That is not true according to the Bible. Personal Christianity begins with the existence of an objective and infinite God.

Genesis 1:1 assumes God; it does not debate His existence. If that personal and infinite God is not the starting point of creation, then we are left to explain every area of life according to frail and questionable speculations. Christians believe in one big, bold miracle—God. As a result, everything else fits into place. The rest of the world denies God, the Creator, and needs a miracle to explain everything created.

If I were truly perfect in all of my ways—in my love, motives, actions, and attitudes, and I had the power to create whatever I wanted, would I not create a being who could appreciate me for what I am? If I were that kind of person and I knew how to transfer that perfection to you,

would I not spend my energies doing so? The answer is obvious. God knew His power and perfection and longed to create men to appreciate Him. God created men to know Him. God created men to enjoy Him. God put in men's hearts the "God-shaped vacuum" that could only be filled with Himself. Personal Christianity begins with that infinite God. Only His person can satisfy man's cry for reality.

No other earthly creation can appreciate God for who He is. Only people have the capacity to glorify God on every level of His revealed character. God longed to create a man with whom He could commune. When we begin to see that as the starting point in personal Christianity, we then see that we are involved in something much bigger than just getting people to "commit their lives to Christ."

*We must know God  
before we can do His will.*

Does God have something to say about Himself that makes our commitment to Christ all the more enjoyable and real? The resounding answer is "Yes!" Could Christ's death on the cross mean much at all apart from God's prior revelation of Himself? The resounding answer is "No!" Present-day tendencies to talk of Jesus to the point of leaving out God the Father give a cult approach to God the Son. The way many talk of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, it is as though those events constituted an end in themselves. Yes, they are central in the heart of God, but they only have substance in relation to God's prior revelation of Himself to man.

"And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee" (John

17:3). According to that verse, the Christian life is qualitative life, not merely quantitative. It is *presently eternal life*—to know God. Why did God create us? To fellowship with us. Why did Christ come to earth? To restore broken fellowship.

Let me warn you here, we must know God before we can do His will. God's character is at stake in our service to Him. Many of us have belittled the name of God to the point that He exists to meet needs, becoming nothing more than a spiritual Santa Claus. We live as if there were not much to God apart from meeting our needs. If there is more to God than that, we have given up the drive to press on to know Him. In most places I preach, people know little of the desire and motivation God gives through pressing on to know Him. They have had "sermonettes for Christianettes" and wonder why they cannot spend a day alone with God and enjoy it thoroughly.

First John 2 gives us the three stages of maturity among believers. John speaks of the "little child" as the one who understands that his sins are forgiven. That stage is very important and in understanding it, we all say "Amen." The "young men" are those who have overcome the wicked one. At that point we have a great drop-out rate among our ranks. There are those strong enough to take on spiritual warfare without hurting God's name in the process, but they are fewer and fewer compared to what we have seen in church history. Finally, John says the third category is "fathers." They are such because they "know God." It is important to note that "fathers" are referred to not only because they are older, but also because it is the father that produces children. They are selfless and secure enough to "grow others up." God knows we are in great need of a double dose of "fathers" within Christianity, not men who are supersaints, but men who understand and know God. That alone will give direction to the sleeping giant called the "church."

## THE SIN OF IDOLATRY

The Bible speaks often about the sin of idolatry. Today, when people think of idolatry, they think of it in terms of worshiping a heathen god or a wooden image. The Bible calls idolatry any form of thinking about God wrongfully. The great need of the hour is twofold: first, the church must understand God as He is revealed to us; second, the church must be made secure in knowing Him.

Paul was one man who knew God. When Paul was in his middle sixties near death, he wrote to Timothy that in the last days men shall be “lovers of self . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:2–5). He could easily be speaking of the church today when he goes on to say that many will hold “to a form of godliness” but deny its power. In effect, Paul is telling us that men will have performance without any passion. They will have a ministry without any motivation—divine motivation. That theme is continued in one of the last messages to the church.

The second chapter of Revelation tells of the church at Ephesus. Their performance was in line, but their motivation was gone. They were more acquainted with having a “handle” on their ministry than having a “handle” on God Himself. They had beautiful form but had no favor with God. “I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance . . . and you . . . have endured for My name’s sake. . . . But I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:2–4).

It is obvious that God desires our love. We cannot have intimate fellowship with one we do not love, and we cannot love one we do not know; therefore, we must pass on to know Him. The level of *love* for Him is directly related to our desire to seek Him. The word love is the pivotal word in

the Bible. Whatever or whomever we love will motivate us. The greater our knowledge of God, the greater will be our love for Him, and likewise the greater our love for God, the greater our motivation. If we do not seek and find our love in God Himself, we will seek it elsewhere. That takes place among many today. It marks the beginning of worshipping the transient and the temporal. The result is a life in which there is little stability, security, and understanding in doing God's will.

In Luke 18 our Lord gave a parable for the last days. In verse 1 He tells us clearly that men "ought to pray and not to lose heart." In verse 8 He continues, asking certain questions. Will the Son of man find faith on the earth in those last days? He asks the question as though He was expecting "No" for an answer. Hear what He says. Will there be people so secure in the "last days" that they will neither give up nor mar God's name through that difficult day? That kind of security would have to be the type God alone can give, that which is lodged in the center of His character and revealed person. Scripture emphasizes the idea that we must find our security in God before we seek it in an activity for God. Many today find their joy and security in what they do for God rather than in what they are to God.

It is the vertical relationship between God and man that is to give expression to the horizontal plane of ministry. This is clear throughout the Word of God (John 21:15-17; James 2:1, 9, 12-13; 1 Peter 1:22). When we make our ministry or service on the horizontal plane the gauge as to how we are doing spiritually, we tend to look at our gift of natural energy as what God desires, rather than His anointing on a life.

Occasionally, I will meet someone who really wants to know God. One evening after the message I was counseling in my office. Seven or eight people were lined up to speak to me. One by one they asked questions to see if I could make

the message clearer. Finally, a seventeen-year-old boy came. He had waited until the rest had gone. He ran to me and buried his head in his hands and cried. Thinking there was a big problem on his mind, I geared myself to meet it.

The young man asked, “Dan, do you ever get tired of hearing people ask you the same old questions that they could just as well get answers for from someone else?”

“Sometimes, I do,” I replied.

He said, “I am here because I long to know God. I have been listening to you week after week, and God has made me so desperately hungry to know Him as you do. Does anyone ever come to you with this desire?”

I was stunned, realizing that this boy was rare. I had counseled fifty people before him who were not interested in knowing God more. As we prayed and committed our lives to one another, God increased the burden for the two of us to keep each other sharp spiritually. I have many friends, but those closest to me motivate my thirst after God.

*God delights in nothing  
more than revealing  
Himself to His creatures.*

It is important here that you understand the difference between “knowing” someone and really *knowing* someone. Paul spoke in Philippians of having the goal of *knowing* the Lord. I can assure you he already knew the Lord when he wrote the statement. He had been a Christian for thirty years. What could he have meant? Paul was aware that there was a higher plane of knowing the Lord, just as a husband

and wife can know one another after thirty years of marriage. Paul was not speaking of a casual acquaintance or an “easy come, easy go” relationship. With passion Paul pressed on to know God—and he knew God. Can we do less? Dare we do less? There is no other explanation for Paul’s great, continued motivation and security in God’s service than the fact that God honored Paul’s pressing goal to know Him.

“I want to know God!” was the cry of this man. He was already strong in the Lord. I know what he meant. My heart burst in tears also as I identified with his plea. He wanted to *know* God. There is nothing that God would rather see in His created children. We were made for that purpose. We are striking the very core of divine desire. The very fact that we are content in our walk with God and are not moved to press on to *know* Him is a sad commentary on our day. God must raise up greater discontent on this issue. If He does not, the last days will find “no faith on the earth.” Self-motivation and self-security will abound and, along with that, disappointment, discouragement, depression, and despair.

When we realize that God delights in nothing more than revealing Himself to His creatures, then we understand why *knowing* Him is our highest calling. In fact, we are allowed to brag about nothing else except that we know God. “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, *that he understands and knows Me*, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; *for I delight in these things,*’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23–24, italics added).

Many Christians are tired of serving the Lord simply for some reward they will receive in the “by and by.” They find themselves living for the Lord out of *duty* and not out of *devotion*. They think, “If I just do right, then I will be right.” The Bible makes clear that it is not what you “do” that

## THE GOD YOU CAN KNOW

counts with God; it is what you “be” that is important. It is character over conduct. As we get to *know* God, His character rubs off on us, and our conduct becomes purely an extension of what we know. “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the *knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings*” (Hosea 6:6, italics added). We have been told for so long to “stand up for Jesus.” However, we must first learn to “sit down with Jesus.” Our standing is merely a temporary exercise if we have not learned how to sit at His feet.

### THE RESULTS OF KNOWING GOD

There are ten great by-products of *knowing* God. If we need biblical results for such an exercise, we are not left empty-handed.

*Character development.* “Set your mind *on the things above*, not on the things that are on earth. . . . Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to [lusts]” (Colossians 3:2, 5, italics added). In counseling I deal with an unusual amount of people who battle over the issue, “How do I discipline my mind?” I tell them, “Whatever you think, you will become!”

Mind-preoccupation will determine our goals, our enjoyment of reality, and our ability to affect other people’s lives for the better. In order for Christlike behavior to be a way of life, there must be a preoccupation with “things above.” That is not a dreamy kind of thing. It is the conscious worship of God’s character that conforms us to what we worship. We always become what we worship. That is a law within even earthly relationships. What you bow down before, you become enamored with. Some people ponder and brood over their past victories or failures. They become past-conscious. Their day begins with the past. As a result, they can never really be what they should be right now, for

this moment. Other people are preoccupied with position, possessions, or pleasure. They actually worship those things. Whether they know it or not, those are the things that control their thoughts throughout the day. They are becoming what they worship.

Obviously, if we choose to worship that which is passing away, we reap the fruit of an equally unstable mind and character. Find me a worshiper of God, and I will show you a stable man with his mind in control, ready to meet the present hour with refreshment from above. Because the average person spends much of his time in either reading or watching someone else perform, it follows that his life is a by-product of what he has seen the most.

What things is your mind set on the most? You must answer that question. It will determine your entire character. God tells us that character can be transformed; it is not just left for events to control. "Where your treasure is, there will *your heart be also*" (Matthew 6:21, italics added). Romans 12:1–2 tells us that true worship transforms the mind. Colossians 2:2–3 tells us that true knowledge of God will produce wisdom and knowledge. That is quite a guarantee. It implies transformed mind and character. Paul put it this way: Gaze on Him and be "transformed" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Learning to worship is the key to mind control and character development.

I require my children to spend an hour alone every day. I do not dictate what they do during that hour. I encourage their quietness for at least an hour because of what it does to their minds and spirits. The result of that quietness can be seen in the children's love for one another and in their lack of murmuring. Don't misunderstand. What I am talking about is the spirit of my children being quiet and sensitive to others. We still laugh loudly and play with gusto, but the inner man of each of them is at home with God. My chil-

dren's ages range from six to nineteen. If this can happen in them, it can happen to all of us. Is your life characterized by an inner spirit of quietness and strength? If not, check what or whom you are worshipping. Gaze on Him and be transformed.

*Freedom from intimidation.* Many Christians live according to the Christianity of other individuals. They walk a tightrope that others have erected for them. They seem to be doing fine until some "supersaint" comes and convinces them they are all wrong. The apostle Paul knew of that danger. He tells us in Philippians to beware of the "conclusion," that is, the false legalist. Paul says that kind of person is out to ruin our joy in the Lord. Colossians, chapter 2, is devoted to getting our minds stable in God in order to combat "superspiritual" intimidation.

Paul mentions four classes of people who try to intimidate us: philosophers, legalists, ascetics, and mystics. The philosophers tell us that we need more knowledge to be what God wants us to be. They make us feel like mental midgets in our walk with God. The legalists try to convict us for not adhering to their lists of dos and don'ts. The ascetics tell us that we have not given up enough yet. Only then, they say, will we be what God wants. Last, the mystics tell us that our experience has not been deep enough to be truly spiritual. One of the greatest satanic lies today is that even though you are a Christian, you still do not have it all. The Lord alone causes growth in our lives. He is our "pituitary gland."

Paul tells us in Colossians 2:23 what to think of man-made regulations that come across as having wisdom but draw us away from the centrality of Christ. He says they are self-imposed, indulge the flesh, and are of no value whatsoever. Those are harsh words for the intimidators. We are to have and to preach convictions, but we are not to give peo-

ple the impression that the convictions make them holy. Holiness is the outgrowth of the worship of the Godhead. Keep your eyes on Christ and let Him feed you as you remain in His Word. Anyone who tries to draw a sharp contrast between yourself and himself is disguising pride with false humility. Get to know God so that your convictions are your own. The early Christians took for granted that holiness was expected among believers. There was no debate on that issue, because they knew and worshiped God. They did not have strict standards because someone preached that they should, but rather God's holiness rubbed off on them through their worship of Him.

*Passion for the lost person.* Many people battle with trying to work up a desire to win lost men and women to Christ. They need to understand that that desire is given to us in direct proportion to the communion we have with God. Someone has said, "Earthbound saints offer little to hellbound sinners." If we are not living where Christ is seated, and if our minds are not knowing His thoughts, we will approach a needy world with a heart of apathy. The key to missions is the key to the prayer closet—spending time alone with God.

We cannot work up what God alone can give. Isaiah 6 says that as the Lord is seen clearly in worship, we will have a proper view of our world around us. Isaiah's experience is the example of that. Having seen the Lord in His fullness and holiness, he saw himself and his world as unclean. After being cleansed in the presence of God, he cried out, "*Send me!*" (v. 8). In a day when most are saying, "Send someone else," we know we are in need of worshipers. Our selfishness has overruled our motivation; we carry no burden that makes us ache for men outside of Christ.

*Energy in serving the Lord.* "But the people who know their God will display *strength and take action*" (Daniel

11:32*b*, italics added). It is the worship and knowledge of God that gives energy to serve Him. The missing ingredient in the diet of the church today is worship. It is the cause for many anemic saints. They know what they should do but have little energy to do it. The early church was a worshipping church. Notice the energy they had in Acts 1 to 6.

Hudson Taylor lived so much in the presence of Jesus Christ that he began to feel the burden of Jesus for lost souls. He said that the burden of Christ became his burden. He found the self-satisfied church in England intolerable. The atmosphere of smug piety sickened him. The security of Christians was found in their possessions, not in their heavenly prize. Staggering out alone, he prayed for twenty-four men to go with him to China, and then he left. Why did no one else have such energy? Others' energies were all taken up with their worship of their possessions, their plans, and their performances before men.

A young Alpine climber prepares to ascend the Alps. Into his pack go the necessities he thinks are important for the trip. His load becomes quite heavy. Early in the climb he is physically exhausted. His body is wearied through its excessive burden. Finally, his guide tells him a choice must be made because not only is he hindering his own progress but also that of the other climbers to whom he is roped. He must either give up his hope of reaching the summit or cast aside the weight. Does he covet the prize enough to count all those things but loss that he may gain the Alpine summit? Spiritually, whatever our hindrance is in reaching the summit, it must be removed. Our spiritual resistance will be lowered if we choose not to let go of the weights and hindrances to worshipping and knowing God.

*Renewed thoughts of God.* Today's "easy believism" doctrine tells us that God is more of a kind gentleman than One who has authority. The value of thinking properly about

God is seen in how we talk and pray. We will always act according to how we think. “As [a man] thinks within himself, so he is” (Proverbs 23:7). Before we see God bring about a change in this generation, we must change our thinking about God and His character.

*True satisfaction in God.* I love the apostle Paul for what he has taught me on this level. He had such contentment in situations, no matter what they were like. He had joy in jail, he rejoiced in rivalry, he had contentment in conflict, and even delight in death. He knew what true worship was. Paul always viewed himself as “in Christ,” not “in jail.” His thoughts were elevated far beyond the circumstances of the mundane. He taught that the world cannot satisfy. Its difficulties do not have to shake us. God is calling out a people today to live as Paul did, whose lives convey the view that ultimate satisfaction can result only from knowledge of God.

*Boldness for God.* Again, the early church had boldness in right order. When they met to adore, admire, and become fascinated with the Almighty, they left with great boldness. They would say as Paul had said, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). What he was saying was, “You can kill me—that will be gain, or you can let me live—that will be Christ. Both ways I win, you lose!” Do you have that boldness? It is not just for evangelical extroverts. It is for those who worship.

*Worship keeps us from putting Christianity into compartments.* The reason for today’s division between the secular and the sacred in the minds of Christians is lack of individuals who worship and know God. The God of the Bible was involved in every area of the life of His children: what they ate, their bodily exercise, their rest, their festivals, and their worship. Today we assume God is good only for spiritual things. Our minds have pushed Him into having effect in a

few areas only. He has much to say about church but offers little insight and enthusiasm to the mundane areas of the secular. How tragic—especially for our youth! I do not even like to use the question, “Is Christ first in your heart?” It gives the idea that something else is second or third. He must be central and work from that position to every compartment in our lives. As we worship Him, we find insight into how to make Him as real on the basketball court as in our church service.

*The cure for situational ethics.* I suppose that many would think that is not a problem among Christians. However, the philosophies of this day have run long enough to make situationalism a problem to the mind that is not anchored soundly. The individual who adheres to situational ethics says that all rules have exceptions, and that the Ten Commandments may be rightly overridden if in doing so you can do more people more good. That makes every situation a question as to whether law keeping is the best we can do. Even moral life becomes like a structureless musical composition in which one improvises rather than plays the notes on the score. The person who follows situational ethics justifies all kinds of deeds on the basis that it was done for a good cause. The church is not free to have “jam sessions” on clear issues. God’s character is revealed as the ultimate standard in every debate we would entertain. The end never justifies the means. Present-day America is suffering severely from reaping what it has sown as a result of situational ethics.

*Knowing the difference between repentance and remorse.* Paul made the clear distinction in 2 Corinthians 7:9–11. Remorse is sorrow in which man is truly sorry for what he did, but he never sees it as God sees it. The remorseful man sees the consequences of wrongdoing and mourns over that. Both Cain in the Old Testament and Judas in the New Testa-

ment are illustrations of that. To repent of something one must know God enough to know how He feels about the sin.

There is more questioning today about the need for repentance than ever before. Our lack of knowing God's character is the reason. When David repented of his sin in Psalm 51, he immediately related it to God's character. Repentance is impossible unless we see sin as God sees it. We do not need someone else's opinion of our sins; we need God's. To repent means to come to the cross and leave the sin there, after we have already seen it for what it was before God. That is why in all true repentance that leads to salvation there is a deep humbling of the life.

One cannot stand erect spiritually and see one's sin as God sees it. It has to break the heart. Has yours been broken? Does God's character not shed any light on the wrongness of sin? A man who worships God becomes a man who keeps "short accounts" with God. Sin is seen for what it is.

We have seen ten clear by-products of knowing God and worshipping Him. Can you say that those ten areas are clearly lived in your life? In which areas are you weak? The cure is in understanding and knowing God. As you continue through this book, pray that God would open your eyes to all that He is.

*Prayer:* O God, is it true that I can be a worshiper of You? I open myself up for You to do just that. Let me know You that I may know Your anointing on my life. I pray as I continue in this book that You would not let me miss anything that You have for me. I give myself to You right now. I will be still and know that You are God. In knowing You, I will love You, and in loving You, I will serve You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.