

“The Surpassing Value of Knowing Christ”
Philippians 3:2-8
(Preached at Trinity, March 12, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 2-3** Paul describes one of the most dangerous heresies of his day. These heretics were known as Judaizers. They presented a perverted form of the Gospel insisting that Gentiles coming to Christ must first be circumcised. As I've pointed out before, we find this heresy often in the New Testament. It was at the heart of the issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council of **Acts 15**. It was also the heresy Paul condemned in the Book of **Galatians**. These people claimed to be the true people of God, those circumcised according to the Mosaic Law. Paul declares that Christians who have trusted Christ by faith alone, both Jew and Gentile, are the true circumcision.
Philippians 3:3 NAU - "we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"
2. The New Testament makes it clear God has but one covenant people.
In the New Covenant there is no division between Jew and Gentile. The true sons of Abraham are the children of faith. Jews and Gentiles in Christ are one flock with one Shepherd.
John 10:14-16 NAU - "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd."
3. In **Verse 3** Paul contrasts the true Israel with the Judaizers. The true circumcision worships God in the Spirit, glories in Christ, and puts no confidence in the flesh
4. In **Verse 4** Paul uses his personal testimony to refute the false claims of the Judaizers. The Judaizers circumcised to declare themselves the people of God and connect them to the ancient promises of Israel.
Paul contrasts his life with theirs. If anyone had the right to boast in their heritage it was Paul. In fact, Paul declares that if it were possible to boast in the flesh, he would have far more to boast of than they. He places his credentials before them.
Philippians 3:4-6 NAU - " If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."

5. Any Jew would have been proud to have Paul's religious credentials. He was born a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day. He was a Pharisee. He would have been honored by all who greeted him.
Matthew 23:6-7 NAU - "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, ⁷ and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men."
6. **Verses 7-8** - Paul is saying that all of these religious boasts meant nothing apart from Christ. All of Judaism had one single purpose: to point to Christ. Everything else was just a shadow. In the rule of types and foreshadows, the fulfillment is always greater than the symbol or type that points to it. How tragic it would be to see the shadow and miss the blinding brilliance of the fulfillment.
7. In **Verses 7-8** he declares that he didn't mind the loss as it was compared to the gain. It almost sounds like an accounting balance sheet.
Philippians 3:8 NAU - " I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,"
- a. Most people forfeit Christ in order to gain the world. It is a foolish trade.
Mark 8:36-37 NAU - "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"
 - b. The person who has gained Christ has found the greatest treasure
Matthew 13:44-46 NAU - "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."
 - c. What is your greatest treasure? Did it change after God saved you? Paul is saying that his whole world turned upside-down. In comparison to the infinite value of knowing Christ, what was previously his greatest treasure had become of no greater value than rubbish. The word for rubbish refers to rotting garbage. The KJV translation "dung" captures the repugnant nature of this rubbish. In comparison to Jesus every other treasure has zero value.
Paul is calling the knowledge of Christ the greatest of all treasures.
 - d. The Puritan, John Flavel, wrote in his book, *The Fountain of Life*:
"“After I have well weighed the case, turned it round, viewed it exactly on every side, balanced all advantages and disadvantages, pondered all things, that are fit to come into consideration about it; this is the result and final determination, that all other knowledge, how profitable, how pleasant soever, is not worthy to be named in the same day with the knowledge of Jesus Christ.” ¹

¹ Flavel, John, *The Fountain of Life*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), page 10.

8. What does Paul mean by “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” It would surely include knowing *about* Jesus. The NT authors loved telling *about* Christ.
- a. John wrote:
John 1:1 NAU - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
John 1:14 NAU - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."
Revelation 1:14-15 NAU - "His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵ His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters."
 - b. The writer of Hebrews wrote:
Hebrews 1:3 NAU - " He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"
 - c. Paul loved talking about Christ. He certainly treasured knowing *about* Christ.
Colossians 1:16 NAU - "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him."
 - d. Jesus Christ was the entire substance of Paul’s preaching.
1 Corinthians 2:2 NAU - "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."
9. But the knowledge Paul is talking about in **Verse 8** isn’t simply speaking of knowing *about* Jesus. Paul knew much about Jesus before his Damascus Road experience. Even Satan knows about Jesus. There are few people in our nation who don’t know something *about* Jesus. You can know *about* Jesus and die in your sins. Some can argue forcefully the Doctrines of Grace – they’ve studied carefully all of the various facets of Reformed Theology. They are passionate about the doctrines but they have no real passion for Christ. There is always a danger of having a “form of Godliness” but denying its power
10. The knowledge Paul is speaking of stirs the passions, but Paul not speaking about merely having warm feelings *about* Jesus. J.I. Packer spoke of this in his classic book *Knowing God* – “What are we talking about when we use the phrase ‘knowing God?’ A special sort of emotion? Shivers down the back? A dreamy, off-the-ground, floating feeling? Tingling thrill and exhilaration, such as drug-takers seek? Or is knowing God a special sort of intellectual experience? Does one hear a voice? See a vision? Find strange trains of thought coursing through one’s mind? Or what?”²
11. So what exactly is Paul talking about when he speaks of his knowledge of Christ? He repeats it in **Verse 10** - " that I may know Him"

² Packer, J. I., *Knowing God*, (Downers Grove, Intervarsity Press, 1973), page 30.

- I. To know God is to have a relationship with Him.
- A. Knowing in the Bible carries the idea of intimacy
1. We can see this with regard to the marital relationship –
The KJV translates יָדָע yada literally.
Gen. 4:1 KJV - "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD."
 2. Knowing God means having an intimate relationship with Him
It means being intimately acquainted with Him. It implies an experience with Him; having communion with Him.
As one commentator describes it: "It means to know him as children and parents know each other, or wives and husbands—knowledge that has to do with personal experience and intimate relationship."³
Matthew Henry describes it as "a believing, experimental acquaintance with Christ as Lord; not a merely notional and speculative, but a practical and efficacious knowledge of him."⁴
 3. God has made it possible for us to know His Son and that through Christ we might be reconciled with the Father.
1 Corinthians 1:9 NAU - "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."
1 John 1:3 NAU - "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."
John 14:21-23 NAU - "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."²²
Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?"²³
Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."
- B. Christianity is about this relationship
1. There is no greater blessing; no greater experience than knowing God
Jeremiah 9:23-24 NAU - "Thus says the LORD, "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; ²⁴ 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."
This is the word יָדָע
 2. This is at the heart of the Gospel. It is at the heart of our salvation
John 17:3 NAU - "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

³ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 318.

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2326.

3. Christianity is about having an intimate, personal relationship with God. It is a unique particular relationship made possible through Christ. **John Owen** – “To know the Lord is to know God as he is in Christ *personally*, as he will be unto us in Christ *graciously*, and what he requires of us and accepts in us through the Beloved. To know God as he is revealed in Christ is the highest privilege whereof in this life we can be made partakers, for this is life eternal, that we may know the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”⁵
4. Salvation is not just us knowing Christ. It is about Him knowing us. We know Him because He knows us.
John 10:27-28 NAU - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them"

II. There is nothing greater and more wonderful than this relationship with Christ; of knowing Him intimately

A. We have been united with Him

1. We are His body

Galatians 2:20 NAU - "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

2. He has promised us His abiding presence.

Mat 28:20 NAU - "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

3. Paul described it as being raised above this present age

Ephesians 2:4-6 NAU - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

B. There is no greater intimacy than knowing Christ

1. We have discovered the greatest of all treasures

2. Those who find Christ will never find anything greater—and they will cease looking. He is the pearl of great price.

3. And yet, although we know Him intimately, we shall never know all that there is to know about Him—and so we never cease seeking.

a. The Apostle John knew something of this

John 21:25 NAU - "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."

b. Calvin wrote: “No matter how far we go, we shall never get past the half way, insomuch that even he that has given up the world

⁵ Owen, John, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Vol. 6*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), pages 167-168.

and forgotten all the enticements and pleasure here below, and is (so to speak) led by an angelic mind to aspire to the kingdom of heaven, shall nevertheless have comprehended only a small portion of the riches of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶

3. For those who know Him they have set their lives in a pursuit of knowing Him more. This is one of the things that drives us to His Word.

Conclusion:

1. Do you know Christ? Not, do you know about Him. Do you have an intimate relationship with Him? Does this relationship have a profound effect upon your life? Are you seeking to please this one who has captured your heart? The phrase, “As to the Lord” is often repeated.
Ephesians 5:22 NAU - "Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord."
Colossians 3:23 NAU - "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,"
Ephesians 5:8-10 NAU - "for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light⁹ (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth),¹⁰ trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."
2. Is Jesus your chief treasure. Is He sufficient. Are you satisfied with Him? Are you seeking to know Him more?
 William Hendriksen – “One gains such *experiential knowledge* by wide-awake attendance at public worship and proper use of the sacraments; by showing kindness to all, practising the forgiving spirit, above all love; by learning to be thankful; by studying the Word of Christ both devotionally and exegetically so that it dwells in the heart; by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the glory of God, and continuing steadfastly in prayer; and thus by redeeming the time as *a witness of Christ to all men.*”⁷
3. There is one more important point that we must not miss. Look again at **Verse 8**
Philippians 3:8 NAU - "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord"
 - A. To know Christ is to know Him as Lord; not just *the* Lord but *my* Lord.
 - B. Paul uses the phrase “Our Lord Jesus Christ” over 50 times.
 - C. Our relationship with Christ is an intimate relationship. It is a relationship of love. But it is always a relationship of submission.

⁶ Calvin, John, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), page 248.

⁷ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Philippians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 5:167–168.