

Knowing God #6

by: Ronald L. Dart

We know from God's own testimony, that it is possible not only to know God, but to understand Him. This is what He said, "But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:24). And we know from reading the stories of the Old Testament that these three characteristics of God: loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness are well illustrated there. To really know and understand God at a personal level, one has to know Jesus, called in the New Testament, the Son of God and the Son of Man.

If You Have Seen Me You Have Seen the Father

On the night of the Last Supper, the Passover, Jesus had a rather long dialogue with His disciples and in that dialogue, He said something really quite remarkable. It is probably familiar to you if you are a Bible reader at all. It's in John 14 and verse one where He says, "Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me. {2} In my father's house there are many rooms, if it were not so, I would have told you. {3} I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come again and receive you unto myself that where I am, there you may be also." {4} Then he said, "Where I'm going you know, and the way you know, {5} Thomas blinked a couple times and he said, "Lord, we don't know where you're going, how can we possibly know the way?" {6} And Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, but by me." {7} Then He said, "If you had known me, you should have known my Father also, and from henceforth, you know him and," He said this astonishingly, "You have seen him." {8} And then Philip, also blinking a little, said, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be sufficient." {9} Jesus turned and looked at him, and said, "Have I been so long of a time with you and you don't know me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father. So why are you saying, show me the Father? "

This is really amazing because here Jesus is saying to His disciples on this occasion, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

So in Jesus Christ, one sees the characteristics of the Father illustrated in the flesh, and at a very personal level. Jesus went on to say, in verse 10, "Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you, I didn't come up with these. My father that dwells in me, He does the works, {11} Now believe me, I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe for the works' sake."

Now this can be a little bit puzzling. It almost sounds as if Jesus is saying that He is the Father, but that can't quite be true. Jesus is on the earth. The Father is in heaven and they talk to each other.

Identity of Father and Son

John's Gospel is very strong and he starts out with this comparison or this virtual identity of the Son and the Father. At the very beginning of the Gospel according to John, he says this, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Now, I'm not one to put too much weight on individual words, but his choice of words in this case has to be significant. John knows precisely what he is saying. He didn't say that the Word came into existence sometime after the beginning. He said, "In the beginning was the Word." Then John said, "The Word was with God and the Word was God." Now this poses a logical problem. How can the Word be God, and be with God at the same time? It is like saying, "You are standing here alongside of yourself."

Is God a Trinity?

Christian theologians have wrestled with this down through time and have come up with the idea that God is a Trinity. Three persons in one. The precise nature of the Trinity is said to be a mystery, so we can not expect to comprehend it fully, but if we bear in mind, one simple principle from the Bible, we can understand all we need to know about God, and this principle is found in Deuteronomy chapter 29 verse 29, which says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." So what we look for is what is revealed.

Now you can go charging through the Scriptures if you want to, and you can create a construct out of the things that are revealed. You can extrapolate, you can draw lines and connect the dots and draw lines on out into space and somehow or other think you have found something more than what is revealed, but you can never be sure.

What we look for is what is revealed. Now when most people use the word 'God', they are referring to the one supreme being who is above all others. The one Jesus referred to as his Father. The problem is, the Bible uses the word 'God' in more than one sense. In the Bible, 'God' can indeed refer to the one supreme being, but it can also refer to a kind of being, and what nearly every reader of the Bible has come to see, is that 'God' is revealed to us in terms of family: Father and Son both God.

God is not to be looked upon as a family, but it is truly odd that Jesus introduces us to God as a Father and Himself as the Son, both of them being God.

Now I really believe a person who, without any theological training, who sits down and reads through the Bible from beginning to end would never come to the conclusion, as a

result of that reading, that God is a Trinity as such. Rather, he would see a God who is the Father and his Son, who is also the same kind of being as God, and a member of the family, who both work through the agency of something called the Holy Spirit. That is what you would see if you just read the Bible and took it at face value.

It takes quite a bit of analysis, quite a bit of reasoning, to come to any other conclusion about God, and you don't really have to go there.

In the beginning was the Word

Now returning to what John said in John 1 verse 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. {2} The same was in the beginning with God, {3} All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." Now this is striking, because what John seems to say is, that all things were made by the Word of God, and in fact, Paul will later tell us that Jesus Christ was the one through whom the Father made all things (Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:16.)

"In him," that is in the Word, verse 4, "was life, and the life was the light of men. {5} And the light shined in darkness, and the darkness didn't get it at all. {6} There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. {7} And he came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe. {8} John was not that light, he was sent to bear witness of the light. {9} This was the true light, which lights every man that comes into the world."

You have to read John carefully because as John develops his themes down through both his gospel and his epistles, the contrast between light and darkness is very strong in his mind and he obviously sees Jesus Christ as the light of the world.

Continuing in verse 10, "He was in the world," that is the Logos, the Word of God "was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world did not know him." Here Jesus was walking down the dusty streets in Galilee, and He's the one who made the world and nobody who saw him even imagined it.

"He came to his own" (verse 11), the Jewish people, "and his own received him not, {12} But as many as did receive him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. {13} Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Now, He comes to the point, {14} "And the Word," That Word that made the world, that "Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth." Later in verse 18. He'll say, "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared him."

So it is the Word, made flesh, that is Jesus, the Son of God, and Son of Man, and it is in Jesus that we actually see what the Father is like at a personal level, and we would expect to find in Jesus, those things that characterize God: loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness.

Jesus Exercises Loving-kindness

So what can we know about the loving-kindness of God, through the person of Jesus Christ? There was an occasion after the apostles had been out on one of the trips that Jesus sent them on, they came back and they told Him all the terrific things that they had done and what they had taught the people. This is in Mark 6, verse 31, "Jesus said to them, "I think it is time to come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while," all of them had been working hard and Jesus had been working hard. "There were many people coming and going, and they had not even had time to eat." So Jesus thought it was a good idea for them to get away from everyone and just rest for a while. Sometimes, you need to let your mind go idle so it can work.

"So {32} they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves." The problem was "a lot of people saw them leave, they knew him and they knew where he was going. And so they ran on foot from all the towns around and they got there before Jesus and His disciples and they gathered around about him." Now here's where the challenge would come in. You and your best friends have gone away to a deserted place to be by yourselves, to take a much deserved rest, you have it coming. There's nothing wrong with your having some time off and here comes a whole bunch of people. What are you going to do? Send them away? Are you going to get irritable with them? Are you going to say, "No, we are not going to do this, we are resting, we're on vacation. We are not going to help you now."

Verse 34, "When Jesus came out and saw them, a great multitude." We learn a little later that there were 5000 men who were there. "Jesus was moved with compassion on them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd, so he began to teach them many things." Jesus felt sorry for these people, and because they had made the effort and had come out there, He said, "No, these people really desperately need leadership. I'm going to have to spend some time with them."

"Now the day," {35} "was really long spent and his disciples came to him and said, "Look, this is a deserted place and it is already getting late, {36} You had better send these people away so they can go into the surrounding villages and get something to eat." Now this was a very sensible suggestion the disciples were making here, but when you have the means to be hospitable, this is what you want to do, {37} "Jesus answered and said, "No, you give them something to eat." They said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii of bread to give them something to eat?" {38} Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." When they came back, they said, "We have five loaves and two fish." How many people? 5,000. {39} "So Jesus commanded to make all these people sit down in groups on the green grass {40} And they sat down in groups of hundreds and 50s. {41} He took the

five loaves and two fish and He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, gave them to his disciples to set in front of the people. The two fish He divided among them all, {42} and everybody in the crowd ate and were filled. {43} And they past around the baskets to pick up the fragments of everything, all of the bread and all of the fish and they had 12 baskets full of fragments, from five loaves and two fish. {44} And those that eaten the loaves were about 5,000 men."

Now what is this all about? Why did Jesus do this remarkable miracle? It doesn't seem to have any theological significance, so why is it here? The logical thing would've been to say, "Look, folks, the day is getting late, you better head off into the villages around here and get yourself something to eat. We are here to rest." But you know, I think the answer is simplicity itself. Sometimes we look for hard answers when the easy answers are staring us right in the face.

Jesus did this because He is gracious and a gracious person does not send his guests away with empty bellies, not when he can give them something to eat, and Jesus obviously could.

What Jesus did was to interrupt his vacation to teach these people, because He is kind and He fed them a meal rather than send them away empty, because He is kind. All of this focuses on the God we encounter in the Old Testament, a God who is loving and a God who is kind.

Do You Want to Know God on a Personal Level?

Now John records another instance in the ministry of Jesus that really is worth our attention. Again, my question is, do you really want to know God? Do you want to understand what He is like? Now, especially at a personal level. If so, then we need a look at this one in John chapter 11, "A certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town where Mary and her sister Martha lived. {2} (It was that Mary that anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)" These were special people to Jesus.

Verse 3, "Therefore Martha and Mary sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, Lazarus whom You love is sick." {4} and when Jesus heard that he said, "This sickness is not unto to death, but for the glory of God that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Now this statement must soon have come to haunt the disciples because Lazarus did die, then John tells us in this account. {5} "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister Mary, and Lazarus." Now I can say, "Well of course He loved them, Jesus loved all men, Jesus loves everybody."

But this is a very important statement. It would be true to say that Jesus loves all mankind, and yet, here is a singular mention of a particular love. Most of us understand the bonding love of friendship. We just may not think of the personal nature of Jesus' love for these three people. {6} "When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed two more days in the same

place where he was." Jesus, we learn, deliberately waited until Lazarus was dead before returning. A very strange thing for Him to do.

And yet, when we see the whole story, we will understand. {7} "Then after that, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go to Judea again." {8} And they said, "Master, the Jews down there wanted to kill you, what do you want to go there for again? {9} Jesus said, "There are 12 hours in a day. {10} If a man walks in the day he doesn't stumble because he sees the light of this world. If you walk in the night you will stumble because there is no light." What he meant was basically, we got to get down there and get to work while we can.

Jesus said to His disciples, {11} "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go so that I may raise him up out of sleep." {12} His disciples said, "Well, we are glad to hear that Lord, if he is sleeping he must be getting better." {13} But Jesus was speaking of his death. They thought he was just asleep. {14} Then Jesus said to them plainly, "No, Lazarus is dead. {15} I'm glad for your sakes I wasn't there because I want you to come to believe. Let's go to him." {16} Then said Thomas, called Didymus, one of his fellow disciples, "Well, let's go too that we may die with him." A little melodramatic, but they went

"Then Jesus came," {17} "And he found that Lazarus had been laid in the grave for four days already. {18} Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about 15 furlongs off." Now the 'four-days' is really important because there was a Jewish custom that had to do with this, there was a concern that somebody who was dead might not really, completely, absolutely be dead, and that there was a period of time of mourning and waiting, about three days, so that you would know for sure that the person wasn't going to revive. It happened back then and it has happened in our modern world too.

Verse 19, "Many of the Jews had come to Mary and Martha to comfort them concerning their brother, Lazarus {20} And Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming went and met him. Mary stayed in the house. {21} Martha said to Jesus, "Oh Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died, {22} But I know, that even now, whatever you ask of God, God will give it to you." I can't think of any reason why she said that, except believing that Jesus still could raise him from the dead.

"Jesus said to her," {23} "Your brother will rise again." {24} Martha said to him, "Well I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." {25} Then Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life, he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. {26} And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" {27} and Martha said, "Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world." {28} When she had said that, she went back and called Mary, her sister secretly, saying, "The Master is come and has called for you." {29} "As soon as she heard that, she rose and came to him, {30} Jesus had not yet entered the town, but he was in that place where Martha met him." He stayed out there.

"The Jews," verse 31, "that were in the house saw her take off and go hastily, and they said, "She's going to the grave to weep there. Let's go along with her" {32} "When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Now that had to hurt. Jesus loved these two women and He loved their brother Lazarus, and both of the women had told Him, "Oh, if you had just gotten here, Lazarus would not have died. He would have lived."

Jesus Wept

Continuing in John chapter 11, verse 33, "When Jesus saw Mary crying, and the Jews weeping that came with her, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." Jesus was genuinely touched at a personal level.

I saw the title of an article in a publication titled: "Can God suffer?" Is it possible for God to feel the pain that human beings feel? Here, Jesus suffered and groaned in the spirit and He was deeply and genuinely touched.

"Jesus said, {34} "Where have you laid him?" and they said, "Come and see." {35} And "Jesus wept." You have probably heard about this, this is the shortest verse in the Bible, two words, "Jesus wept."

"Then the Jews said, "Behold how he loved him!" {37} And some of them said, "Couldn't this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" {38} Jesus again groaning in himself came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay upon it. {39} Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha said, "Oh no Lord, by this time he may have been dead for four days, he will stink." {40} Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you, If you believe you would see the glory of God?" {41} Then they took away the stone and Jesus prayed a short prayer and {43} He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" {44} And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot in the grave clothes, his face bound with a napkin. Jesus said, "Loosen him, let him go!" {45} Then many of the Jews, who came to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed on him." I would certainly think so.

You know when I read this account of Jesus groaning in the spirit and Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, it seemed strange to me, because Jesus knew what He was going to do. He deliberately waited until after Lazarus was dead. Jesus knew that He was going to bring Lazarus back to life again. Why did Jesus weep?

I did not fully understand this, until I sat by my mother's side in the hospital as she died. I thought I was prepared for her death. She lived a long time. Her body was worn out. It was time for her to go and so I was comforted by that. I sat by her bedside and waited and finally the line went flat on the monitor over her bed and I cried like I hadn't cried since I was a child.

Real Love at a Personal Level

When Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, it was a manifestation of real love. It was a very human response to the presence of death, but it was more than that, it was the response of God. It was real love at a personal level.

The writer of Hebrews understood this and tried to develop it, so that his readers would understand that Jesus Christ, as our high priest, was not distant from us. He wasn't a God off in heaven somewhere, who may or may not hear our prayers, and who may or may not love us as a member of a class of people.

He said this in Hebrews 4 verse 14, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. {15} Because we don't have a high priest, which cannot be touched, with the feeling of our infirmities, but he was in all points tempted like us, yet without sin, {16} So let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Let me tell you what I take away from this. The love of God is real! The kindness of God is real! The love of God is personal! God does not merely love me as a member of a class. He loves me as a person, all by myself. I might not know that, if it wasn't for Jesus, making it clear.

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus' last Passover, speaking to His disciples, He said in John 14 verse 19, "Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you see me, because I live, you shall live also. {20} At that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you, {21} He that has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me and he that loves me shall be loved of my father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Notice all these third person singulars, "him, him" not just to them, or of a group, or to the church, but to the individual that loves God. He will be loved by God, and "I will love him," Jesus said, "and I will manifest or show myself to him."

Later in John 15 verse 7, Jesus says this, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask what ever you will, and it shall be done to you. {8} Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit. That's the way you'll be my disciples. {9} As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Continue in my love." What an astonishing thing Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, not as one of many, but as a person, all by yourself." "Greater love," said Jesus in verse 13, "has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

That's why I keep telling you, you were Born to Win.

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