

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
January 20, 2013

Gaining in Jesus Christ

Read Philippians 3:7-11

Key verse: “Those things were my assets, but I wrote them off as a loss for the sake of Christ” (Philippians 3:7).

“The ecstasy and joy of sex is supposed to be a foretaste of the complete ecstasy and joy of total union with Christ. The moment we see Christ face to face...we will be naked, yet so delighted in [our nakedness that] we will be unashamed....The Lord God will look at us through Jesus and say, ‘I love you.’ ...Great sex is a parable of the Gospel—to be utterly accepted in spite of your sin, to be loved by the One you admire to the sky” (Timothy Keller from his sermon “Sex and the End of Loneliness”).

This passage from Philippians is about what it means to pursue “total union with Christ.” This is a passage about one’s relationship with Jesus Christ, something that is more important than anything else in all of life. This is a passage about “the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (v. 8).

It is important to see that the word used here for *know/knowing* indicates *personal* knowledge, not theoretical, abstract, or merely intellectual knowledge. Paul no doubt had in mind that *to know*, as used in the Old Testament, is a word used to speak of sexual intercourse: “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bare Cain” (Genesis 4:1). For Paul, the most important thing in all the world is to know Jesus Christ in a personal, growing, life-changing way.

That relationship is based not on one’s good works or achievements: “In Christ I have a righteousness that is not my own and that does not come from the Law but rather from the faithfulness of Christ. It is the righteousness of God that is based on faith” (v. 9).

William Barclay paraphrases Philippians 3:8-9 as follows: Paul says this, “All my life I have been trying to get into a right relationship with God. I tried to find it by strict adherence to the Jewish Law. I tried to find it by keeping every smallest detail of the Law. I tried to please and to satisfy God in that way, and thus to get into the right relationship for which my heart and soul were longing.... I found the Law and all its ways of no more use than the refuse thrown on the garbage heap to help me to get into a right relationship

with God. So I gave up trying to build up a goodness of my own. I gave up trying to achieve this relationship, and I came to God in humble faith, as Jesus told me to do, and I found that fellowship I had sought so long and had never found.”

“Knowing Christ,” then, involves a relationship that is personal, growing, and *up-to-date*. For example, just because I have a relationship with my spouse that is wonderful today does not guarantee it will be that way next year. For that relationship to grow, both of us must invest in it. Knowing Christ is that way, too. It is a person-to-person relationship.

For Paul, “knowing Christ” means certain other things:

1. “Knowing Christ” means to experience the power of His resurrection (v. 10). The resurrection is not only something that happened to Jesus. The resurrection is a living power that operates in the life of the believer. As we allow the Holy Spirit to fill and control our lives, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead works in us! This resurrection power is the source of our victory over sin, self, and satan. This resurrection power is the source of life abundant and eternal.

2. “Knowing Christ” means to know “the participation in his sufferings” and “being conformed to his death” (v. 10). “I can say that I never knew what joy was like,” said Malcolm Muggeridge, “until I gave up pursuing happiness, or cared to live until I chose to die. For these two discoveries I am beholden to Jesus.”

3. “Knowing Christ” means walking with Jesus daily—in this intimate, personal relationship—until one day we stand in His immediate presence, to love and serve Him for all eternity! (v. 11) “To know Christ,” wrote William Barclay, “means that we share His every experience. It means that we share the way He walked; that we share the Cross He bore; and that we share the death He died; and that finally we share the life He lives for evermore.

“To know Christ is not to be skilled in any theoretical or theological knowledge. It is so to experience Him, and so to know Him with such intimacy that in the end we are as united with Him as we are with those whom we love on earth; and that, just as we share their experiences, so we also share His.”

Thanks be to God.

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)