

The Excellency Of The Knowledge Of Christ

Scripture Reading: Phil. 3:5-8

WHAT IS EXCELLENT?

Through his years in Judaism, Paul gained a detailed knowledge of the law. His knowledge was not that of an outsider, but of a very zealous insider. But by the time Paul wrote the book of Philippians, he had been transferred out from under the law into Christ. Now he had both the knowledge and the experience of the wonderful, all-inclusive, and extensive Person of Christ. Paul lived in this Person and could therefore speak of himself as a man in Christ (**2Cor. 12:2**).

Christ stands in contrast to the law, the zeal for it, and the righteousness in it. On account of Christ and the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, Paul gave up the law, his zeal for it, the righteousness in it, and all other things. According to verse 8, Paul not only counted all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and suffered the loss of all things, but he actually counted them to be refuse. The Greek word for *refuse* denotes "**dregs, rubbish, filth, what is thrown to the dogs; hence, dog food, dung.**" There is no comparison between such things and Christ.

In verse 7 Paul says "**on account of Christ,**" but in verse 8 he goes further and says "**on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.**" It is important to realize that in 3:8 **Paul does not speak of the excellency of Christ, but of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.** Many readers of Philippians take the word *excellency* to refer not to the knowledge of Christ, but to Christ Himself. However, Paul specifically and definitely speaks of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. The addition of the words *my Lord* indicates that as Paul was writing, he was filled with intimate, tender feelings concerning Christ. Tender feelings concerning the preciousness of the Lord Jesus rose up within him, causing him to speak of "Christ Jesus my Lord." Paul placed great value on the excellency of the knowledge of his dear Lord Jesus Christ.

On account of this, not only did he count the law and the religion founded on the law to be loss, but he counted all things loss. Here Paul speaks not directly of the excellency of Christ, but of the excellency of knowing Christ. The knowledge in 3:8 is not the knowledge that belongs to Christ, the knowledge that Christ Himself has; **it is our subjective knowing of Christ.** To you, which is more excellent—the Person of Christ or your knowing Christ? According to doctrine or opinion, you may say that the Person of Christ is more excellent than the knowledge of Christ. However, Paul, speaking from his experience, could say that it is the knowledge of Christ which is more excellent.

DERIVED FROM THE EXCELLENCY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

The excellency of the knowledge of Christ is derived from the excellency of His Person. The Jews consider the law of God given through Moses the most excellent thing in history. Hence, they are zealous for the law. Paul participated in that zeal. But when Christ was revealed to him by God (**Gal. 1:15-16**), he saw that the excellency, the super-eminence, the supreme preciousness, the surpassing worth, of Christ far exceeded the excellency of the law. His knowledge of Christ issued in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. By knowledge we actually mean a revelation, a vision, concerning Christ and His excellence. When Paul was blind and in religion, he could not see Christ; he could see only the law. Thus, he had the excellency of the knowledge of the law. But after Christ was revealed to him, he began to have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. He was captured by the excellency of knowing Christ, and for the sake of this knowledge, he was willing to drop all things and count them to be loss.

Perhaps you knew only that Christ is the Son of God sent by the Father in His mercy to die on the cross for the salvation of sinners. You knew that He was born of a virgin, that He died on the cross, that He was raised from among the dead, and that He was exalted to the heavens. You believed in Him as your dear Redeemer and precious Savior, and in this way you were saved. Then you realized

that you need Him to help you live in such a way as to glorify the Father. It is good to know Christ in this way, but this knowledge of Him is far too limited.

In Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, Paul opens the veil to show us who Christ is and what Christ is. Christ is all-inclusive and all-extensive, the reality of every positive thing in the universe. He is the reality of God, man, eternity, light, and life. We simply do not have adequate words to declare who and what Christ is. The revelation in Colossians concerning Christ is extensive, even all-extensive, for Christ is more extensive than the whole universe. He is immeasurable, limitless. Hence, He is not only all-inclusive, but also all-extensive.

According to the Bible, Christ truly is all-inclusive. Colossians 2:16 and 17 say, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." These verses indicate that Christ is our eating, drinking, feast, new moon, and Sabbath. He is the body, the reality, the substance, of all the positive things in the universe. He is the reality of the air we breathe, of the food we eat, and of the sunshine we enjoy. Furthermore, He is the reality of both the Triune God and of man. Christ is God, man, and the reality of all positive things. But this does not mean that the material things in the universe are God Himself. We are not God and we never shall become God. Nevertheless, Christ is in us and, in a very real sense, He is even becoming us.

OUR URGENT NEED FOR THE EXCELLENT KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

When Paul was still in Judaism, he was blind to the all-inclusive Christ. Christ existed as the all-extensive One, but Paul was totally ignorant of Him. At that time, Paul had a thorough and excellent knowledge of the law. But one day, as he was on the road to Damascus, Christ appeared to him. (Acts 9:4). After the Lord was revealed to him and he was converted, scales fell from his eyes. His eyes having been opened, he began to see Christ and to know Him. The more he saw Christ, the more he received the knowledge of Him. This is the reason he speaks in Philippians 3:8 of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

There surely is such a thing as the excellency of knowing Christ. If you testify that Christ is excellent but do so without having the knowledge of Him, you will be speaking merely according to tradition. Unless we have the excellent knowledge of Christ, we cannot say that Christ is excellent. We urgently need the excellent knowledge of Christ. Paul was so desperate to have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ that he was willing to count all things loss on account of this knowledge.

We have pointed out that the excellency of the knowledge of Christ is derived from the excellency of His Person. There can be no doubt that in Himself Christ is excellent. But if we do not have the knowledge of Christ, how shall we know His excellency? If we lack the knowledge of Christ's excellency, His excellency will not mean anything to us.

Before Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, he did not have any knowledge of Christ. He treasured the law and regarded it as most excellent. Paul's zeal for the law was a sign of his appreciation of the law. His zeal came out of his appreciation. Paul certainly was proud of his excellent knowledge of the law. Even though Christ is infinitely more excellent than the law, Paul did not have the knowledge of Christ. But at the time of his conversion, this excellent One was revealed to him. With this revelation of Christ, Paul began to have the knowledge of Christ. After he began to acquire the knowledge of Christ, Paul came to realize that the knowledge of the law received through Gamaliel was far inferior to the knowledge of Christ. Conscious of this comparison as he was writing 3:5-8, Paul could speak of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and of suffering the loss of all things for the excellency of this knowledge.

To be sure, the excellency is in the very Person of Christ. But for our experience, our realization of this excellency depends on our knowledge. If we lack knowledge, there is simply no way for us to realize that this Person is so excellent. Only when we come to know His excellency do we have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. How precious is this excellency of the knowledge of Christ.