

## WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO KNOW CHRIST

By: Pastor Dennis Miller – November 3, 2010

Before we ask, or attempt to answer, the question of what it really means to know Jesus, I think it would be helpful to lay a solid foundation by asking the other side of the question first. What does it really mean for Christ to know us? Or, we could ask, "How does Christ know us?" The Bible actually teaches, very clearly, that Christ knows and understands our fallen condition. He can truly sympathize with each and every sinner.

**HEBREWS 4:15** – For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus knows us. He can sympathize with us [*"touched with the feeling"* is one word in Greek. It comes from the word "sum-pa-the-o"] because He entered into our experience. Notice how Hebrews chapter two describes this.

**HEBREWS 2:11** – For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren...**14** Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same...**16** For verily he took not on *him the nature of angels*; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. **17** Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren...**18** For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

We read that Jesus is one with us. He partook of fallen flesh and blood, taking the seed ["spermatos" in the Greek] of Abraham, a fallen man. In all things He was made like us. How do we know this? Because he wasn't just *"tempted"* like we are, but He *"suffered"* being tempted. It wasn't an act. It wasn't a performance. Jesus didn't just go through the motions and follow a script on the "conflict of the ages" stage. The Bible says that He *"suffered"* being tempted. The million dollar question is this, "What causes suffering during temptation?" Temptation, in and of itself, is not painful. It's only when you try to resist temptation that it becomes painful. Think about this for a moment. Let your mind go to the garden of Gethsemene. See the Saviour resisting the great temptation to do His own will and struggling with great intensity to surrender to His Father's will and drink the cup of God's wrath for our sin. It was so intense that the Bible says He sweat *"great drops of blood."* [LK. 22:44] Listen to how the Bible describes this kind of suffering.

**HEBREWS 12:4** – Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

The Bible says that **WE** have not yet *"resisted unto blood."* What haven't we resisted? Why aren't we striving against sin? The word *"striving"* means *"fighting."* We have not fought against sin and strained every nerve, muscle, and fiber of our being to the point where blood bursts through our sweat glands like Jesus did in Gethsemene. But why would anyone want to fight so hard against temptation that they would actually sweat blood? Isn't it because they don't want to sin against God. They're fighting the fight of faith. They're willing to die rather than break God's holy law. This is why Jesus suffered when He was tempted. He resisted and fought against temptation. He denied self and kept His life, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in harmony with God's holy law and will.

Let's stop here and make sure we're clear on one point. Christ knows us because through the incarnation He entered into our experience and was tempted like us. Because of this, He knows our moral weaknesses and our spiritual infirmities. Let's be clear. He knows us through temptation, not sin. He knows what it feels like to come to the edge of the cliff of temptation looking down into the valley of disobedience below. But He never stepped over the edge. He never fell. He never sinned. He was tempted in all points but *"without sin."* Temptation is not sin. It's the yielding to temptation that constitutes sin. And Christ never yielded. Not once. This is where I ask the next question. What does it really mean for us to know Jesus? How do we really know Him?

The Bible is very clear. It is absolutely crucial that we know Him. In fact, John tells us that to know Him is life eternal.

**JOHN 17:3** – And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

What is life eternal? Life eternal is to know God and Jesus Christ. How do we know Him? It makes sense to me, and I hope it does to you, that we know Him the same way He knows us. He knows us because He's familiar with our weakness and temptation. We know Him because we become familiar with His obedience and His struggle to stay pure. Let's explore this through the Bible. Notice what Paul says about knowing Christ.

**PHILIPPIANS 3:10** – That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death

Let's examine this verse thoroughly without rushing past it with too much speed. Paul wants to know Christ. And he describes three ways to do just that.

1. The power of His resurrection
2. The fellowship of His sufferings
3. Being made conformable to His death

[1.] What does Paul mean by the *“power of His resurrection?”* Because I believe that numbers one, two, and three above are related and speaking of the same experience, I want to point your attention to Romans chapter six. Notice the resurrection language. And notice what the power of the resurrection accomplishes.

**ROMANS 6:1** – What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? **2** God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? **3** Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? **4** Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. **5** For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: **6** Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. **7** For he that is dead is freed from sin. **8** Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: **9** Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. **10** For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. **11** Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. **12** Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

What is Paul's conclusion in verse twelve? Don't let sin reign. What does that mean? Don't obey the lusts of the flesh. How are we to do that? Paul teaches that the power of the resurrection enables the enslaved sinner to walk in newness of life; not the sinning of the old man, but in the obedience of the new man. The power of the resurrection is the new life of obedience. In other words, it's the experience to know Christ through overcoming sin just as He did. Remember, He knows us through identifying with us in our weakness and temptation. We know Him through identifying with Him in His strength and determined will to obey God.

[2.] Number two, the *“fellowship of His sufferings,”* is very plain at this point. We know Christ suffered being tempted because He said no and didn't choose to sin. He chose to surrender His will and obey God's holy law. Notice what Hebrews five says,

**HEBREWS 5:8** – Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.

If we want to know Him through the fellowship of His sufferings, then we too must learn obedience the way He did, through suffering. Notice how the Bible describes Moses' experience in Hebrews twelve.

**HEBREWS 12:24** – By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25 **Choosing** rather to **suffer affliction** with the people of God, than to **enjoy the pleasures of sin** for a season; 26 Esteeming **the reproach of Christ** greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

What did Moses choose? He chose to do God's will which led to suffering rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a little while. He abandoned a lifestyle of disobedience and it cost him suffering and affliction. But it gained him the reproach of Who? Christ. If he would have stayed in Egypt, which represents slavery and bondage to sin, He would have never been able to know God the way he did. But he left Egypt. And he began the difficult and painful journey of walking with God all the days of his life here on earth. He couldn't have Christ without the reproach. And He couldn't suffer the reproach without leaving Egypt.

[3.] The last thing that Paul describes, as essential to knowing Christ, is *"being made conformable unto His death."* Paul is saying that he can't truly know Christ unless he dies like Christ. That's what *"conformable"* means. But does that mean that unless we all die on a cross we can't know Christ. If that were the case, then Paul wouldn't know Him because he died on a chopping block not a cross.

I believe that this statement is related to the previous two. This is just the last stage of the process of knowing Christ. You see, the *"power of His resurrection"* begins that process. It's called baptism. This is where we begin the new life of faith. The second step is the *"fellowship of His sufferings."* This happens as we walk in the path of obedience to God Word. The last stage obviously ends in death. In other words, we would rather die than sin against God and transgress His law. This experience is mentioned of Christ by Paul in his epistle to the Philippians.

**PHILIPPIANS 2:8** – He...became **obedient unto death**, even **the death of the cross**.

Jesus wouldn't compromise with the Devil. He maintained His loyalty to God all the way to the cross. He was willing rather to die on that cruel cross than break one of God's commandments. Until we're willing to do this, we can never truly know Jesus. We will have no clue how fierce this battle with sin, the flesh, and the devil and his angels is. We must be made *"conformable unto His death"* that we may know Him.

The good news today is that we **CAN!** Listen to what Paul calls us to do to make this happen.

**PHILIPPIANS 2:5** – Let this **mind be in you** which was also in Christ Jesus...

We can have the same thoughts, motives, values, priorities, and feelings as Jesus had. We can live His life. We can walk in His footsteps. We can know Him! We can be one with Christ!

This reminds me of the new covenant promise that God makes to us and calls each one of to experience. Notice the language carefully and prayerfully.

**HEBREWS 8:10** – For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; **I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts**; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: 11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for **all shall know me**, from the least to the greatest.

What does God do in order for us to know Him? He writes His laws into our minds and into our hearts. And why is this necessary? You guessed it. Actually you didn't. You just read the text. That's right. God says I do this so that you *"shall know me."*

Friends, Jesus knows you. He knows me. He was "tempted in all points like as we are." And I can know Him. And you can know Him; when we are tempted, *"yet without sin."* [**HEBREWS 4:15**] And that's life eternal!