

# That I may know Him

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What is the treasure in your heart? What is it that matters most to you in life? What do you want to pursue with all your heart and give your life for? How does this affect you in practical terms in your daily life? Is it important enough to affect every aspect of your life?

## What is the treasure?

Let us look to the Lord to consider what this treasure ought to be and how we can, by choosing the right treasure, rise to a higher level of moral and spiritual quality in our being.

Let us consider Mark 10: 17, 21, 29 and 30 and ponder over the meaning of this treasure.

### **Mark 10: 17, 21, 29, 30**

17 And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and *began* asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

21 And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake,

30 but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."

In verse 17, this man came before the Lord Jesus, asking how he could inherit eternal life. He sought for eternal life. This passage indicates to us that his aspiration was in the right direction. The Lord Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." While this man asked the Lord Jesus how he could inherit eternal life, the Lord Jesus, in showing the way, told him how he could have treasure in heaven. We see therefore that the treasure in heaven is directly related to eternal life.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples in verse 30, "and in the age to come, eternal life". "The age to come" refers to our time in heaven. We see therefore a direct relationship between "eternal life" and "treasure in heaven". In verse 29, we see that this "eternal life", together with God's

provision for what is meaningful for us while on earth, will be ours only when we are prepared to be deeply committed to Him and to follow Him and His will. Our commitment to Him must be more important than all else, and must hold true even when it involves parting with the things of this world, where they hinder us from being faithful to Him.

The rich man, while longing for eternal life, was not prepared to part with his riches in order to obtain it. We should learn from that failure to understand what we need to do on our part so that the Lord will be pleased to grant us treasure in heaven.

In verse 30, the Lord Jesus also said, "...along with persecutions." This phrase is important because it tells us the context in which we will, and we should continue to, pursue this treasure. While the treasure in heaven is associated with God's provision for what is meaningful and helpful for us, it is also meaningfully and deeply associated with this term "persecutions", which is a representation of different kinds of difficulties and sufferings that will come our way in the path of following the Lord and pursuing the treasure in heaven. We should not seek to run away from these difficulties because they are part of the meaningful life that God has called us towards, in the process of seeking and obtaining the treasure in heaven.

It is important for us to understand what the right treasure is. We have seen that it is treasure in heaven and that it is directly related to eternal life. It is a long-lasting treasure of the highest quality and it directly affects the meaningfulness and quality of our hearts. The Lord Jesus teaches us that the treasure we pursue will affect the state of our heart:

**Matthew 6: 21**

"...for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also..."

If we choose the right treasure and increasingly do so, we will rise to a higher level of moral and spiritual quality in our being and in our living.

## **Eternal life and knowing God**

How do we find this treasure in our daily living?

In John 17: 3, we read the words of the Lord Jesus in His prayer to God, the Father, in which He expresses a primary aspect of the meaning of eternal life:

### **John 17: 3**

“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

Eternal life is directly and deeply related to knowing God and knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the context of eternal life that we can deeply know God. It is in the context of eternal life that the Lord Jesus Christ will be real to us. Without eternal life, all our knowledge of God and all our beliefs and practices will be of no value to us. Without eternal life, divine love would not be formed in our hearts and all that we are, all that we have, and all that we do would be described as: “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”, “I am nothing”, and “it profits me nothing”. We would have missed the treasure in heaven!

### **1 Corinthians 13: 1-3**

- 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- 2 And if I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

How can we receive eternal life?

The Lord Jesus told the Jews in John 6: 53 that they did not have life in themselves and that they needed to partake of His life in order to have that life:

**John 6:53**

Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves."

The Jews already had physical life, but the Lord Jesus told them "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves." He was not referring to physical life. He was telling them how to find spiritual life, eternal life. This is made clearer in the next few verses:

**John 6: 54-58**

- 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.  
55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.  
56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.  
57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.  
58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever."

It is as we partake of the life of the Lord Jesus that we will have life from God because we do not have spiritual life in ourselves. If we want to have eternal life, we must partake of that life from God. As we "eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood", we can receive that life.

Although God has already given all of us physical life when we come into this world as moral beings, we do not have spiritual life until we choose to come to God to receive this life from Him. Eternal life, which is spiritual life, comes from the being of God, and will only be imparted to us when we come to Him in a humble and submissive spirit to receive that life from Him.

Eternal life refers to the life of God, and we can be partakers of that life only in the context of the right moral choice, when we choose the

path of righteousness in identification with God. God does not impart His life to us unless we ourselves want it. He does not give us His life without our positive moral response. Eternal life comes to us from God's divine nature and His life can be transmitted to us through the Lord Jesus and become a part of our moral and spiritual character, transforming us in the quality of our being:

**1 John 5: 11, 12**

- 11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
- 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

The elaboration of this principle is seen in John 6: 27, where the Lord Jesus said:

**John 6: 27**

"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, *even* God, has set His seal."

He says, "Do not work for the food which perishes." "The food which perishes" can only grant to us temporal, natural life, physical life. We should not be pursuing the things of this world that will eventually perish. Instead, we should be seeking for "the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you..." This spiritual food comes from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. As we partake of Him, that life comes to us.

**John 6: 63**

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."

Here, we see that it is in the realm of the spirit that we will receive eternal life and the Holy Spirit can grant to us that life, because He is the Spirit of God. The Lord Jesus said, "...the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." As we receive from the Lord Jesus what He communicates to us, and we appreciate its meaning and reality, and are

submitted to Him in faith – in trust and in commitment – in our response to Him, then His life will be imparted to us.

We see then, that eternal life comes from God. We need to partake of the life of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the One who helps us to receive that life. This is possible only when we come to God with a right attitude in our heart.

**2 Peter 1: 3, 4**

- 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.
- 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Here, the apostle Peter tells us how we can have eternal life. God has made every provision to help us receive eternal life, and the way to obtain eternal life is to become a partaker of the divine nature, to receive the life of God, to enter into a meaningful relationship with Him. “Having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” – if we have sufficiently, adequately and meaningfully rejected the offer of the world, if we have turned away from a life lived according to the spirit of the world, if we have turned away from the path of unrighteousness, corruption and sin, and if we are now committed to the path of righteousness, we can then richly partake of the divine nature.

God’s provisions for us are of the highest quality and to the fullest extent: “everything pertaining to life and godliness”. They come from His deepest concern for our well-being: “His precious and magnificent promises”. His kind intention is for us to “become partakers of *the* divine nature”.

What then would be the outcome if we increasingly partake of the divine nature?

In Galatians 4: 19, the apostle Paul puts it this way:

**Galatians 4: 19**

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you--

The apostle Paul laboured very hard to help others so that the glory of the character of the Lord Jesus could be formed in their hearts. "Christ is formed in you" refers to the life of God, the divine nature, now being united with us, so that the moral beauty of the character of the Lord Jesus becomes a part of our character. We do not have spiritual life in ourselves, but as we respond positively and deeply to God, we can be transformed to be like Christ in His character. The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6: 17 that when we respond positively and deeply in identification with the Lord Jesus, we are united with him in the realm of the spirit:

**1 Corinthians 6: 17**

But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

As the life of Christ is incorporated in our moral and spiritual being through our union with Him, the spiritual reality can be described as "Christ is formed" in us. It is a description of what takes place when we increasingly partake of the divine nature.

## **The treasure and purity of heart**

This meaningful direction of life can also be appreciated from the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5: 8, where He said:

**Matthew 5: 8**

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

In this context, the meaning of "they shall see God" is not a reference to seeing God with our physical eyes or even beholding God in the spiritual realm. We know that ultimately all moral beings will see God



on the Judgment Day, whether they are morally good or morally evil. The blessedness of 'seeing God' must therefore refer to knowing God at a personal level in a morally meaningful sense. The most meaningful sense of knowing God involves a deep relationship with Him of oneness of heart, leading to the highest level of friendship and freedom. In this state, our fellowship with Him arises from oneness of direction in moral and spiritual values.

The meaning of "they shall see God" in this sense is dependent upon and arises from our choice and commitment to God and the path of moral and spiritual goodness in a spirit of dependence on God ("the pure in heart"), where we learn to partake of the life of God, receive eternal life in increasing measure, and Christ is formed in us. This results in quality in our oneness with God in the realm of moral and spiritual character. It involves our identification with His will, His ways, and His purposes. We will then know the spiritual reality expressed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5: 8: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

In order to meaningfully see God, in order to develop a deep and meaningful relationship with God, there must be an emphasis on moral and spiritual goodness in our lives. If our emphasis, our treasure, centres on moral and spiritual goodness and the moral perfection in the being of God, then, our heart will become increasingly pure, and we will then enter into a deeper and deeper oneness with God. We will then see God, in increasing quality of meaning and reality.

The reality of "the pure in heart" is not merely an absence of sin but the presence of moral and spiritual substance of the highest quality in the heart. The apostle Paul expresses it in this way in 1 Timothy 1: 5:

**1 Timothy 1: 5**

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

It is a primary aspect of “the goal of our instruction”. We must develop a heart that is pure, which is associated with divine love and sincerity in our faith in God and walking in the light. This kind of heart is likened to that of pure gold, which is uncontaminated by impurities and is of the highest quality. Revelation 21: 18 refers to pure gold in the physical sense:

**Revelation 21: 18**

And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass

In the moral and spiritual sense of ‘pure gold’, we see that Job recognized its great value, where he expressed his confidence that trials and difficulties in his life would bring about purification of his heart to produce quality at the highest level, likened to gold that has been highly refined and has become pure.

**Job 23: 10**

“But He knows the way I take; *when* He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold...”

## **Two facets of the treasure**

We see then that treasure in heaven involves these two features: knowing God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in terms of the quality of fellowship, relationship and oneness as the first aspect, and the moral and spiritual quality of our being as the second aspect. These two aspects are very deeply related.

If we want to know God deeply, if we want to know the Lord Jesus deeply, there must be moral and spiritual quality in our being. The greater we develop the quality of purity of heart, the deeper will be our fellowship with God, and the greater will be the meaningfulness of our oneness with Him.

There are different levels of quality in both of these areas. To what extent have our lives, our character, been transformed by our pursuit of our treasure in heaven? How deeply have we nurtured our fellowship with God in all aspects of our lives? The answers to these questions will help us understand how effectively we have pursued our treasure in heaven.

We go through different stages in our development and there are different levels of experience of this reality. These principles that we are considering will be relevant to us at all stages of our development. Throughout our lives, we should continue to learn and grow such that the reality will continue to increase with each passing day.

### **Example of the apostle Paul**

What then are the practical issues involved? What are the practical implications of taking such a course of action so that we can continuously rise to a higher level of moral and spiritual quality and a deeper relationship with God?

The life of the apostle Paul is a very good example to help us to appreciate the way to rise to a very high level of moral and spiritual quality and a deep and abiding relationship with God by the manner of pursuit of the treasure in heaven.

Let us prayerfully ponder over and learn from the apostle Paul's testimony in Philippians 3: 4-11:

#### **Philippians 3: 4-11**

- 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. 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.

- 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ,
- 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,
- 10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
- 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

## That I may know Him

In verse 10, the apostle Paul says, “that I may know Him...” This corresponds with what we are considering of the pursuit of the treasure in heaven. The treasure in heaven centres on knowing God and all that arises from that: knowing God in His moral and spiritual perfection, being transformed to be like Him, and working together with Him in all His plans and purposes. We can say that the meaning of “that I may know Him” represents the correct choice of treasure. The apostle Paul gave himself fully for that.

“That I may know Him” in this context is a reference to knowing the Lord Jesus Christ, but it points in the same direction as seeking to know God, the Father. We can see this principle expressed in John 14: 7-9:

### John 14: 7-9

- 7 “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”
- 8 Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”
- 9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”

The Lord Jesus tells us, “He who has seen Me, has seen the Father.” We come to the Father through the Lord Jesus. This direction, “that I may know Him” is what we also should seek for: to know God and to know the Lord Jesus Christ – this is eternal life and our treasure in heaven.

When we are serious in our faith in the Lord, we may readily recognize that knowing God personally and deeply is a very meaningful path. We may indeed earnestly long to know God more deeply, but have we sufficiently pondered over the practical implications of what it will cost us in knowing God in this way? If we want to appreciate the significance of this phrase “that I may know Him” and to live according to the richness of its meaning, we need to carefully consider what the apostle Paul said before and after this phrase “that I may know Him”.

What precedes this phrase “that I may know Him” tells us of the prerequisite for us to enter into that realm of knowing the Lord – what we need to do before we can embark meaningfully on this path of knowing Him. There is something that we need to do, that we ought to do, in order to enter into that realm of knowing Him. Verses 10 and 11 tell us how we can rise to higher level as we enter into the realm of knowing Him. What precedes and what follows the phrase “that I may know Him” can be viewed as descriptions of two different kinds of level of knowing the Lord. Within these two levels there are many different grades in which we may experience the reality of knowing the Lord. The difference in emphasis in these two levels helps us to appreciate major principles we need to consider if we want to choose treasure in heaven, if we want to know Him deeply.

In this message, we will concentrate on what precedes the phrase “that I may know Him”. We will look to the Lord to consider what comes after this phrase in the next message in this series.

## **Rejecting the way of the flesh**

In verse 4, the apostle Paul said, “although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more...” From the context, we see that “confidence in the flesh” hinders us from

knowing the Lord Jesus in a personal and meaningful way as it is opposed to true worship. It refers to confidence in our own natural abilities, personal circumstances and personal achievements without meaningful dependence on God.

Confidence in the flesh arises from walking in the flesh, living according to natural inclinations and self-seeking ways. When we do not seek God in humility in order to submit to Him and His ways but instead walk in our own ways and according to our own desires, we readily develop confidence in the flesh – confidence in our natural abilities, circumstances and personal achievements without meaningful dependence on God. The apostle Paul told the Corinthian Christians that people in the world readily take pride in their natural abilities and achievements in this world – their confidence in the flesh. God wants to teach us to walk in humility and in healthy dependence on Him.

**1 Corinthians 1; 26-29**

- 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;
- 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
- 28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,
- 29 that no man should boast before God.

When we indulge in the life of the flesh, when we walk according to the flesh, we concentrate on what we desire for ourselves, in a spirit of self-seeking rather than in a spirit of learning in submission to God and His ways. In such a state we will not truly know the Lord in a meaningful relationship. We will be preoccupied with our own desires and ourselves and we will not be identified with God. The apostle Paul explains in Romans 8: 5-8 that walking according to the flesh leads to hostility towards God:

**Romans 8: 5-8**

- 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.
- 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,
- 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*;
- 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Paul tells us that he could have much confidence in the flesh. There was much that he could boast of in terms of the treasures of this world – his background, his religious associations and his personal efforts in keeping the Law. He came to recognize that this confidence in the flesh would prevent him from finding true meaning in life in the Lord because this way of life arose from his self-life, in going his own way.

**Self-life and the flesh**

This wrong way of life, in walking according to the flesh, is a manifestation of self-life and is referred to in what the Lord Jesus declares in John 12: 25:

**John 12: 25**

“He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.”

“He who loves his life, loses it” refers to the person loving his life in this world – pursuing what the world can offer him rather than seeking to walk with God in the path of righteousness. Confidence in the flesh arises from such an approach to life, where our own ways and desires are primary. It does not arise from a deep and meaningful fellowship with God, but follows the direction of the spirit of the world in its self-centred pursuits.

We see then that confidence in the flesh is deeply associated with the self-seeking approach. It moves in the same direction as 'loving his life in this world'.

In Philippians chapter 3, verses 5 and 6, the apostle Paul referred to his own context and his own life, concentrating on areas that were important to him, when "confidence in the flesh" was prominent and valuable in his life: "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." He was referring to moral and spiritual issues and pursuits, which Christians today may also pursue in a similar way, although in a different context. We may place our confidence on the spiritual activities and associations in our lives, and the status that is accorded us among Christian groups without adequate consciousness of how God perceives us and whether He is truly pleased with our lives.

"Circumcised the eighth day" was associated with keeping God's Laws and being faithful to God's instructions. "Circumcised the eighth day": in this context refers to what Paul's parents did on his behalf because he belonged to the nation of Israel. He came from such a context, associated with the keeping of the Laws of God, associated with the nation of Israel. God had called the nation of Israel from the world, to reveal His ways to them, so that the world could benefit from God's revelation and His grace. Paul was associated with this as a member of the nation of Israel, "of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews" – deeply associated with the people of the Law. "As to the Law, a Pharisee": he was a religious leader, one who could be recognized as knowledgeable, able and faithful in keeping the Law. "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church": this referred to his zeal for the Law of God, his zeal for God. He thought that the Christians were leading people astray, and in his zeal he persecuted



the church. He thought that he was serving God by persecuting the church. This is described in his testimony recorded in Acts 26: 9-11:

**Acts 26: 9-11**

- 9 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
- 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.
- 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities..."

In his persecution of the church, the apostle Paul was depending on his own natural wisdom and ability. It was not the result of a meaningful seeking of God and fellowship with him. This led to serious negative actions and consequences, including "when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them", "I punished them often in all the synagogues", "I tried to force them to blaspheme" and "being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities". The phrase "I thought to myself" is a suitable description of the approach taken in walking in the flesh – making decisions on the basis of our own abilities and own natural understanding without meaningful seeking of God and dependence on Him. In Christian service, it is also easy to do the same: doing many things according to what we think is spiritual service without proper seeking of the Lord's will, and trusting in our own abilities and knowledge rather than depending on God's enabling. This is an expression of "confidence in the flesh", arising from the path of walking in the flesh.

**Beware of mistaken treasure**

Paul thought that he was serving God and that he was walking in the ways of God. He thought that he was living a life of righteousness. He had sought to keep the Law according to his own understanding, such that he could say: "As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found

blameless". In reality, it was confidence in the flesh. It did not arise from a proper submission to God. It did not arise from a meaningful fellowship with God. It did not arise from walking according to God's instructions in its true meaning and intent. He was keeping the outward form of the Law, but not the spirit of the Law and it was not true moral quality. Although his personal circumstances, his own achievements and his own way of thinking seemed to be right, seemed to be spiritual and morally positive, in reality they were not. His confidence was in the flesh.

In verse 9, he tells us his change in attitude and approach: "not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*". That was what he sought for previously. "A righteousness of my own" refers to self-righteousness based on keeping the Law through his own efforts and abilities without a proper spirit of submission to God and dependence on Him.

It is also possible for us, in seeking to pursue treasure in heaven, to be in reality pursuing treasure on earth. Paul thought that he was pursuing treasure in heaven at that point of time. He thought that he was serving God. He had zeal for God. He thought that he was living righteously, but he later came to realize that it was not so. He was, in fact, pursuing treasure on earth.

This can also be true of us. We may seek to serve God, to honour Him and to live a life of righteousness, but if our spirit is not right in our pursuit of righteousness and we do not accurately understand what is true treasure in heaven, we may also find that in reality we have been pursuing treasure on earth. Unless we learn to walk in true submission to God and His will and His ways, we may find that at the end of our lives, there is no spiritual life and value in our hearts and in what we

have done. Our path of confidence in the flesh will lead to spiritual barrenness and death.

We therefore need to be careful as we seek for treasure in heaven, to correctly identify what that treasure is and how to pursue it, not in our own ways, our own thinking, but in accordance with God's ways, in accordance with God's revelation, in accordance with true righteousness.

If Paul had chosen to love his life in this world, and if he were to continue to put confidence in the flesh as he did previously, he would have lost his life in the sense of what the Lord Jesus said: "he who loves his life loses it."

However, we see that Paul applied the correct principle – he 'hated his life in this world'. The Lord Jesus tells us: "he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal". That was how Paul found eternal life. He learned to 'hate his life in this world'. We can see this in verses 7-9

**Philippians 3: 7-9**

- 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ,
- 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,

Paul said in verse 7, "whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Paul rejected the things that "were gain to me". In that sense, he 'hated his life in this world'. He gave up and he rejected what he previously had confidence in, and beyond that he gave up all things in order to "gain Christ". He gave up his treasure on earth: living by his own abilities, his own inclinations, his own preferences, his own way of thinking, and his own desires. He now concentrated on

what was true righteousness, what was the will of God, what was consistent with true moral and spiritual goodness. He learned to depend on God, to receive life from God and to walk humbly with God.

When Paul said, “whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss”, he was referring to what he mentioned earlier, what he had confidence in. We also need to do likewise. What have we been confident in, in ourselves? What are the things that we have preferred in our natural inclinations? What has been the way of our thinking that we have thought is right but has not arisen from a proper submission to God, without a proper spirit of humility and healthy dependence on God? Are we still holding on to all these? We need to give up all that we have pursued and obtained according to natural inclinations and in a spirit of independence from God in order to seek God, submit to Him and depend on Him.

There are areas in the natural realm that may not necessarily be wrong, but if our natural inclination forms the basis of our choice rather than what is right and meaningful before God, we will be prevented from drawing close to God and developing a deep and personal knowledge of God.

### **The one thing and what it costs**

The apostle Paul said, “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” He wanted to emphasize that he had decided on giving up everything that could hinder him from knowing the Lord deeply. He said, “I count all things to be loss”. He gave up everything in order to concentrate on one thing.

“I count all things to be loss in view of (the one thing) the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Knowing God and knowing the Lord Jesus Christ became the central pursuit of his life for which he gave up all

things. The apostle Paul said that he gave up all things “for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” and he went on to say, “for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.” In order to pursue the treasure in heaven, he regarded all that he had and all that he desired in the past as rubbish. They were of no value to him anymore: no more confidence, no more desires, no more seeking of those things. He now concentrated only on that which is in Christ Jesus: God and His moral and spiritual perfection, His will, His ways, the moral and spiritual principles of God’s kingdom and true righteousness and holiness.

In his life, the apostle Paul did in fact suffer the loss of all things and he continued to rejoice in all circumstances that God brought him through. He testifies in Philippians 4: 11-13:

**Philippians 4: 11-13**

- 11 Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.
- 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.
- 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

In the physical realm, he was “content in whatever circumstances I am”. He continued to rejoice in the Lord “in any and every circumstance”, “being filled and going hungry”, and “having abundance and suffering need”.

In the realm of relationships with others and the opinions of men, he was at peace when he was despised and rejected and when others regarded him as worthless. He testifies in 1 Corinthians 4: 10-13:

**1 Corinthians 4: 10-13**

- 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.
- 11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;
- 12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.

The apostle Paul was not distressed when he was regarded as a fool, when he was perceived as weak and without honour. He continued to be gracious and kind when reviled, persecuted, slandered, and when he was treated as “the scum of the world, the dregs of all things”.

Are we willing to go through such times in the path of knowing the Lord? Will our hearts be calm and tranquil if we are regarded as “fools for Christ's sake”? Will our commitment to Him remain unwavering in the midst of opposition, ridicule and rejection by others as well as through changing circumstances of pleasantness and pain and suffering?

### **What kind of righteousness?**

In Philippians 3: 9, the apostle Paul went on to say: “and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith.” The righteous deeds that we have done, from which we derive our own righteousness, are like “a filthy garment” in the sight of God: the ugliness of our own self-righteousness. This truth is expressed in Isaiah 64: 6:

#### **Isaiah 64: 6**

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

On the other hand, when we come to God by faith and submit to Him and trust Him, we receive true righteousness that comes from God. This faith that leads us to true righteousness is not merely a mental recognition. It involves our moral and spiritual response and commitment to God and His ways, as we trust in His provision and His help and receive His life. When there is true faith, we will become truly righteous before God. This will lead us in the direction of growing depth in our personal knowledge of Him.

## The principle of “deny himself”

The step taken by the apostle Paul when he “counted all things to be loss” is part of the practical implication of the principle of “deny himself”, which the Lord Jesus has stated clearly as a requirement for all who want to come after Him and follow Him:

### **Luke 9: 23**

And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

This is what the apostle Paul did. When he decided to come to the Lord Jesus to follow Him, and to seek for the treasure in heaven, he was fulfilling the condition of “deny himself”. He gave up himself totally to pursue the heavenly treasure. He denied himself in every aspect that hindered him from a true and personal knowledge of God.

In our spiritual development, this principle of denying ourselves requires continuous and ever deepening application. There are many Christians who may say, and sincerely say, that they want to follow the Lord. They want to honour Him. They want to do what is right, and yet they find that in their daily lives, they often do the things that are not right and not pleasing to the Lord.

If we want to be transformed in the quality of our heart to a higher level of living, we must learn how to apply this principle of “deny himself” in ever deepening measure.

There are many areas of our lives, which we may have nurtured over many years in the direction of self-life, through walking in the flesh and having confidence in the flesh, in our own desires and ways of thinking. We need to deal with them honestly, deeply and thoroughly. This includes prayerful consideration and recognition of our areas of deficiencies and failures and what we may refer to as weaknesses, and

then to deal with these areas effectively and thoroughly through our union with the Lord. This is the direction that will help us to become increasingly pure in heart. If we do not deal with our self-life at its deepest level, our heart will never be pure. It will be mixed. It will be corrupted. We will be impure in our motives and in our direction. Our knowledge of God will be significantly hindered. If we want to know Him deeply, we must persevere in this path to develop purity of heart.

Sadly, most Christians are keen to know the principle of knowing God, but not keen to consider the principle of the self-life. They find it disturbing, discouraging and depressing. Yet, unless we are prepared to face this deeply, to recognize how to deal with it thoroughly, how can we meaningfully know God who is perfectly pure? How can we see Him and know Him and be one with Him who is absolutely pure if our hearts are impure? We can understand this but will we take the necessary steps to live by it?

When we do not deal with our self-life deeply, we may wonder why we do not know God so deeply. We may lament that He does not listen to our prayers and He does not help us in our need. In such a situation, we need to pay heed to Isaiah 59: 1-2, where God explains that it is not that He cannot hear, it is not that He cannot save, but our iniquities, our sins, have hidden His face from us:

**Isaiah 59: 1-2**

- 1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear.
- 2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.

Our iniquities, our sins, affect the freedom with which God can relate with us, help us, and have fellowship with us. We therefore have to deal with these areas thoroughly and deeply: we must be unafraid to face these issues honestly before God, and be prepared to be helped by



the Lord in whatever way He sees fit. At times this may be very painful and emotionally difficult. If we are committed to Him and we depend on Him, we can grow in the path of deepening knowledge of God in our fellowship with Him.

The principle of “deny himself” has a direction. It is not merely rejecting what is negative. It deals with the negative in order to move in the direction of arriving at the truly positive. It deals with negative areas in our lives so that we can be pure and good. It refers to developing the quality of righteousness in the midst of dealing with unrighteousness, developing moral goodness in the context of dealing with sins. There is a process of transformation, of renewal, the change from the morally negative to the morally positive.

In Luke 9: 24, the Lord Jesus says:

**Luke 9: 24**

“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”

The principle of “deny himself” involves dealing with morally negative areas in our lives as well as learning to identify with the Lord Jesus in His will and His purposes. We must learn to give up our lives for His sake. As we do so, we will develop in the quality of righteousness in our hearts as well as quality in our oneness with Him.

We see this reality lived out in the life of the apostle Paul, as he testified in Philippians 3: 7: “those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” This was in accordance with what the Lord Jesus said: “whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” This is what the apostle Paul did: he ‘lost his life’ “for the sake of Christ”.

In verse 8, he says: “for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.” “For whom I have suffered” tells us

that he “suffered the loss of all things” for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. It therefore led to an increasing oneness with Him.

In verse 9, he says, “and may be found in Him...” Again, we see that it is in the Lord Jesus Christ and it is for His sake that Paul took the step to “deny himself”. We learn to give up whatever is of the flesh in order to pursue our treasure in heaven.

Let us ask the Lord to help us to understand these issues more deeply and to live by what He teaches us. He wants to help us to rise to a higher level of knowing Him, and to constantly live in His presence and by His power, not only in pleasant times, but also in times of persecution, difficulty, pain and suffering, and through it all, to increasingly grow in our knowledge of Him.

If we go through suffering that is associated with our sins and failures, we must correct ourselves, in repentance and in faith, seeking the Lord’s forgiveness and help.

If the pain and suffering arise in the context of our being faithful to the Lord, let us rejoice that He is pleased with us, and that we will grow in our fellowship with Him. As we trust Him to strengthen us, we can be assured that our character will be transformed and our oneness with Him will deepen.

Let us therefore ask the Lord to help us to respond well in every situation. Whether in the context of faltering or faithfulness, let us draw nearer to Him, submit to Him and receive His life so that His character will be formed in us, and our hearts will be truly one with Him.