

## *That I May Know Him*

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Today's message serves as a springboard to our summer pulpit series that will be take from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, a.k.a. Philippians.

Why did Paul write this letter? There are several concerns that seem to be in the mind of Paul was he writes this letter.

1. First, it is clear that Paul wanted the church to know how things were going for him in his imprisonment (1:12-26) and what his plans were should he be released (Phil 2:23-24).
2. Second, there appears to have been some discord and division in the church and so the apostle writes to encourage humility with a view toward unity (2:1-18; 4:2-3).
3. Third, Paul, the pastoral theologian, writes to head off the negative teaching and consequences of certain false teachers (3:2-3ff.).
4. Fourth, Paul wrote to commend and assign Timothy to the church as well as to give the church a report about the health and plans of Epaphroditus, who served along with Paul (2:19-30).
5. Fifth, Paul also wrote to thank the church for their concern for him and the financial gifts they had given (4:10-20).

But today we are going to skip ahead and journey into chapter three of the letter to the Philippians where Paul begins to attack false teachers and their doctrines. In verse two he writes:

*(Phil 3:2 NASB) Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;*

The statement "*Beware of dogs*" is used by Paul to refer to Jews who professed to believe in Christ but attempted to keep the ritual of Judaism for their salvation. Not only did they attempt to keep the law for salvation, they insisted that unless others in the company of believer kept the Law of Moses, they would not be saved.

Paul regards this teaching as dangerous and subversive to the Gospel of Christ. As it was dangerous in Paul's day it is dangerous in our day as there are those in the church today who have prescribed a list of rules and regulations for God's people and will tell you that if you do not keep their list you are not saved.

Paul says, "beware of them..." He uses the term "*dog*" which was a familiar term of reproach commonly used by Jews to describe Gentiles who neglected the rites of Judaism, such as circumcision.

But Paul flips it around and labels the Judaizers as the real "*dogs*." He says, "*Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision...*"

In contrast to the Judaizers who were of the false circumcision, Paul writes of Christians in verse three:

*(Phil 3:3 NKJV) For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,*

Paul is saying in verse three that believers are the true circumcision—not those who are born of Jewish parents or who have been literally circumcised, but those who realize that the flesh profits nothing, and that man cannot do anything in his own strength to win God’s approval.

The Judaizers were going around teaching that one gets saved by believing in Jesus Christ and doing something else like getting circumcised and keeping other rituals.

There are those who go around today teaching that one gets saved by believing in Jesus Christ and doing something else like getting “water baptized” or “the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.”

Some go around and teach that you become a Christian by believing in Jesus Christ and attending *their* church. Paul would say these kinds of teachers are of the “false circumcision.”

In verse three, Paul gives three characteristics of those who are of the true circumcision:

- 1) *They worship God in the Spirit.* The Judaizer’s worship was nothing more than a ceremony. Their worship was form and fashion and it had no substance because God wasn’t in it.

Many of the trappings of religious ceremony we find in churches today are vestiges or leftovers of Old Testament shadows of things to come concerning Christ who was to come. But now Christ has come, we no longer need the shadows of things to come—we have the real deal! We have Jesus Himself!

So, Paul says, the *true* circumcision “*worships in the Spirit.*”

- 2) *They rejoice in Christ Jesus.* Members of the true circumcision rejoice in Christ Jesus, or better, “*they glory in Christ Jesus.*”

Jesus Christ alone is the ground of their boasting. They do not pride themselves in their personal attainment, in their cultural background, or in their faithfulness to sacraments.

- 3) Those of the true circumcision *have no confidence in the flesh.* They do not think that they can be saved through fleshly efforts in the first place or be kept in their Christian walk by their own strength.

Those of the true circumcision don’t boast in their natural abilities and accomplishments because when it comes to salvation and what one has the ability to achieve, a Christian really comes to the Lord empty-handed.

In fact, if there was anyone who would have reason to glory in his natural abilities and accomplishments, it was the Apostle Paul. Listen to his words in verse four:

*(Phil 3:4 NKJV) though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:*

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest writes in his Word Study on this verse, “The Judaizers had confidence in the flesh. That is, they trusted in human attainment, in the works of man. *Theirs was not a supernatural system in which salvation was a work of God for man, but a natural system in which salvation was a work of man for God.*”

Today, in order to find success in the job market one must sell himself and one of the best ways to do this is with a resume. A good resume lists a person's strengths, skill sets and career accomplishments. The Judaizers were teaching that along with faith in Jesus Christ, one must have a good "religious resume" in order to be saved.

In view of this, Paul was saying, "If confidence in the flesh is the means by which God accepts us, I can boast about my accomplishments, in fact, I can boast more than you all! Just check out *my* resume!"

Paul wasn't bragging here, he wasn't being arrogant; he was just stating the facts and in verses 5 and 6, Paul shows off his resume.

*(Phil 3:5 NIV) circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law[1], a Pharisee[2];  
(Phil 3:6 NIV) as for zeal, persecuting[1] the church[2]; as for legalistic righteousness[3], faultless.*

But listen to what he says in verse seven, "*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.*"

Paul is using *accounting* terminology here as if he had in his hand the "profit and loss statement" of his life to that point. Paul added up all the numbers for each of his life-accomplishments after he did, the sum total of all he accomplished was zero...zilch...nada. In reality, it was less than zero.

When Paul added up all of his accomplishments in the flesh and when he compared it to all that Christ is he had a negative balance.

You may remember from grade school that subtraction is nothing more than taking the difference of a comparison. After comparing all that Christ is and all that Christ has done with his own assets and accomplishments, Paul realized that he had a negative balance—a loss!

Now when something like that happens with our bank account, the first thing we do is check the figures and make sure that we didn't make a mistake.

I imagine Paul checking his figures and finding that he had omitted a few of his own credits:

- 1.) *His financial and material gain*—you know Paul was a tentmaker and tents were a much-needed commodity in his day. I imagine Paul recalculating the figures and still coming out with a loss.
- 2.) *His intellectual accomplishments*—Paul goes to his file cabinet and comes across some old receipts for his seminary tuition payments. You see, he graduated from the School of the revered Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3). He added this accomplishment to his list of credits but to his amazement he still came out with a loss!
- 3.) *His moral accomplishments*—Paul grabs his family photo album and there were pictures of his family—he had a rich heritage. The nerve of his parents taking pictures the day he was circumcised—he couldn't even look at them! There was the picture of his Bar Mitzvah celebrated when he turned 13 years old—when it was time for him to read the Torah—he recited it from memory. Flipping the page he finds an old faded picture of his grandfather—a reminder that he himself was from the Tribe of Benjamin.

Before closing the family album Paul comes across a snapshot someone took of him pouring over the books of the Law in his study. Paul was not only deeply familiar with the Torah, he had also studied the Talmud, the record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs and history.

- 4.) *His rabbinical knowledge* - Paul knew the Scriptures and he was acutely acquainted with the traditions of Judaism but when adding this accomplishment to his list of credits he still came out with a loss!

Paul brings all his discoveries together and concludes in verse 8:

*(Phil 3:8 NIV) What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ*

He has suffered the loss of all things because compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ as Lord, they are nothing. The things that Paul used to consider most precious, he now considers to be dung—*manure, garbage, rubbish*.

The other day I was having a conversation with some of the faculty at the school where I work. Someone had asked me about my education background and as I was telling them about my 2-year degree and my bachelor's degree, I began to feel a little small when I realized I was among those with masters and doctorates.

Not only did Paul count his accomplishments as less valuable than knowing Jesus Christ, but in the highest degree contemptible, when compared to Christ.

There is an old hymn of the faith that I believe communicates the heart of Paul: *Rock of Ages*.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the water and the blood, from Thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labor of my hands can fulfill Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress; helpless look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyes shall close in death,  
When I soar to worlds unknown, see Thee on Thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Augustus Montague Toplady/Thomas Hastings, 1830.

In our text, Paul is looking back to the events in his life which led to his salvation. He is giving his readers a glimpse into his life during the time that led up to his salvation.

Do you remember when you first believed? Do you remember the day you surrendered your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

I wish I could say that my conversion was as spectacular as Paul's. Paul was on his way to take Christians into custody because he saw them as an affront to Judaism. Acts chapter 9 tells us what happened while he was on his way:

*Acts 9:1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest*

*Acts 9:2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

*Acts 9:3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.*

*Acts 9:4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*

*Acts 9:5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*

*Acts 9:6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

*Acts 9:7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.*

*Acts 9:8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.*

*Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

Paul was on his way to arrest Christians but little did he know that he himself would be arrested on that road to Damascus.

Did you know that each one of us...who like Paul...each one of us who crosses over from spiritual darkness to spiritual light has to come by way of a Damascus Road experience? It may not be as dramatic as was Paul's experience but nevertheless, it happens just as sure as you are born again.

The old man never goes down without a fight. The old self doesn't want to give up control which is exactly what must happen if you are to become a Christian—in fact, Paul says in Romans chapter six that the old self must be put to death.

I was 18 years old when I prayed the sinner's prayer to become a Christian. A family member shared with me how Christ had died for my sins and was buried and was raised from the grave so I could be forgiven. I was invited to ask Jesus to be my Savior and that is what I did. I thought to myself, "*The Gospel makes sense; I'm going to follow Jesus.*"

I had just graduated from high school and was on my way to New Jersey to attend a technical institute. I knew something was different about me when I left. But I left Baltimore with the three-fold mission to make good grades, to find a church to attend in Piscataway, New Jersey and to meet some beautiful girls!

After spending five months in New Jersey and making good grades at the technical institute, I never found a church and couldn't even get one date, so I returned to Baltimore.

I enrolled at a community college and was “playing the field.” I got the girls, my grades were average and I still didn’t find a church—because I wasn’t looking for one.

In reality I was a lonely man and the weekends were pure misery. Whenever I went to a party or a club, I felt uncomfortable and became a wallflower. One day I just gave up on the weekends altogether because the loneliness was so deep and it was at this time I decided to go to church to serve the Lord and to find a wife.

At church I jumped in with both feet. I attended Sunday school, joined the gospel choir, became a Boy Scout leader and was elected to be superintendent of the Sunday school and I was 21 years old.

It was while on the choir that I first fixed my eyes on the woman who would become my wife. If I told you all that transpired during the 18 months before we were married it would take another sermon.

Debbie and I were married; both of us products of broken homes; both of us having children out of wedlock before we were married. We didn’t know how to do marriage. We didn’t get any counseling—not one session. All we remember our pastor telling us is that we would be able to have sex after we were married.

Now you have two, 22 year old kids, married with children from prior relationship; not knowing anything about marriage; living under the same roof. Deb had been a single mom for about 8 years before marrying me—she had been both mother and father to two children, one who was disabled.

Within the first year of our marriage the sparks were flying. We were so confused about what our roles and responsibilities were. I was a jealous man—who needed my wife to affirm me but she didn’t know how. She was a domineering woman who needed a husband to tenderly love her but I didn’t know how.

This is when my Damascus Road experience hit me. I was at my wits end. I didn’t know what to do. I loved my wife but I didn’t want to keep going through all this drama. Should we call it quits? This wouldn’t be the first time in the history of the human race that a couple has “thrown in the towel.”

One day after another of our blows up and after Debbie went to her mother’s house, I was in the apartment alone. It was at this time when I had my Damascus Road experience. I went into the bathroom and fell down on my knees and using the toilet as an altar I cried my heart out to the Lord.

I told the Lord, *“If I wasn’t serious about asking You to be my Lord and Savior back a few years ago, I’m serious about it now.”* I said to Him, *“I was tired of playing games and wanted to walk right before Him.”*

I recommitted my life to the Lord on that day and promised to follow Him all the days of my life.

*2 Cor 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted of...”*

Paul had his Damascus Road experience and on that road and the days following it he forgot the things that were behind him. In Philippians 3:8 we find that Paul counted all things loss and rubbish so that he might gain Christ.

Not only did Paul want to gain Christ, verse nine tells us that he wanted to be found in Christ:

*(Phil 3:9 NKJV) and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*

Paul had already tried to cloth himself with the self-righteousness by attempting to keep the law—if you read through Romans chapter 7 you will find that all this did was push him further into the pit of unrighteousness.

*Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."*

The law God gave through Moses was never meant to make a person righteous—it was given so that we might know that we were sinners and needed a Savior. Paul writes in Galatians 3:24 that “...*the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*”

Once one comes to Christ by faith, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to that person. This is what Paul is trying to communicate in this passage. He didn't want anyone to give him any credit for the life that he was living by faith and the resulting righteousness that was being displayed. If there was going to be any kudos or accolades, he wanted them to go to Christ!

He wanted men to see in his life the righteousness the Holy Spirit would produce the positional righteousness and the practical righteousness—both that came in his answer to his faith in Christ.

By the way, one cannot “clean up” themselves! Many who are confronted with what the Bible says about their need for Jesus Christ respond with something like, “*I got to stop drinking or smoking...*” *I've got to stop partying and change my ways.*”

If truth be told, that's been the problem for many. They've been living for themselves so long they've deceived themselves into thinking they have to handle their own redemption. Let me tell you a little secret: **YOU CAN'T SAVE YOURSELF!**

This was Paul's problem before his Damascus Road experience. He was trying through all his pedigree, education and law-keeping...to save himself. Paul got saved only after he had come to the conclusion that “*all his righteousnesses were like filthy rags*” (Isaiah 64:6). Paul had to suffer the loss of all things that he might gain Christ.

If you are holding on to anything other than Jesus, thinking by these things God will save you from sin, you are gravely mistaken and not saved.

If you are banking on anything...your pedigree, your family's religious tradition, a church denomination, the day you were confirmed or baptized or walked down the church aisle...if you are banking on anything but the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, you are not saved.

If you think that by being a good person, or keeping the Ten Commandments, or giving money to the church or by singing on the choir or even by preaching a sermon that God is going to look at your good works and weigh them against your bad works and if your good works outweigh your bad works, He will let you into heaven...if you are thinking this way, you are not saved.

Paul had to suffer the loss of all things that he might gain Christ. He had to suffer the loss of all things that he might be found in Christ. But there is one more pursuit that Paul was engaged in. He suffered the loss of all things that *he might know Christ*.

*(Phil 3:10 NKJV) that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,*

If I were to ask you the question, “Do you know Jesus Christ?” How would you answer? There are those who would say, “Oh sure!” Then they would proceed to give you a list of things or *facts* they know about Him:

He is God.	John 1:1
He is the Creator of everything.	Colossians 1:16
He is all-powerful.	Matthew 28:18
He is all-knowing.	Colossians 2:3
He is ever-present.	Matthew 18:20
He is holy.	Luke 1:35
He is righteous.	Isaiah 53:11
He is guileless.	1 Peter 2:22
He is sinless.	2 Corinthians 5:21
He is spotless.	1 Peter 1:19
He is innocent.	Matthew 27:4
He is gentle.	Matthew 11:29
He is merciful.	Hebrews 2:17
He is forgiving.	Luke 23:34
He is worshipped by men, angels and even demons.	
He was human.	1 Timothy 2:5
He was conceived by the Holy Spirit.	Luke 1:34-35
He raised His body from the dead.	John 10:18
His blood brings reconciliation with God.	Ephesians 2:13-16
He came to save sinners.	Luke 19:10
He will bring in everlasting righteousness.	Daniel 9:24
He destroyed the works of Satan.	1 John 3:8
He fulfilled the Old Testament.	Matthew 5:17
He sends the Holy Spirit to us.	John 15:26
He will take His people to heaven.	John 14:3
He will return to the earth after the tribulation.	Matthew 24:29
He will return to the earth in power and glory.	Matthew 24:30

But Paul isn't concern in verse 10 with what you know *about* Jesus. The word “know” that Paul is uses is from the Greek word, *ginosko*, which means to “know by experience”.

How do you really come to know someone? By reading about them? By listening to what someone else says about them? You really get to know someone by spending time with them.

When I was a teenager, my older sister, who lived in the Bronx section of New York City, invited me and a friend to come spend a few days with her in her apartment. She was a student at Fordham University.

While in the Bronx we followed her like we were her shadow. My sister was a vegetarian and we ate what she ate. Up until that time I thought I knew my sister but spending a few days with her in the Bronx, I really got to know her more!

Listen to Philippians 3:10 again: “... *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...*”

Paul wanted to know Jesus—he was not content in knowing things about Jesus. There are some in the church who are content in just knowing about Jesus. They come out to church on Sundays and listen to the teaching of God’s Word but that is all. They may even come out to the weekly Bible study but all they are content with is learning things about Jesus.

Paul didn’t just want to know about Jesus, he wanted to know Jesus *and the power of His resurrection*. Paul longed to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. This power is the same force that brought Christ out of the grave.

Every believer in Jesus Christ has been resurrected. The Scripture lets us know that we died with Him, we are buried with Him, and we have risen with Him. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that we understand the power of the Resurrection.

Paul is saying that he wants to know what it’s like to live a resurrected life, to no longer be in bondage to the flesh, to have victory over sin. Knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection means that you live a resurrected life yourself.

If you stick a fireplace poker into the fire and leave it there long enough, it will become red hot, signifying that the heat of the fire has heated the poker. If you take that poker and hold it close to a piece of paper, the paper will catch on fire because the heat will transfer to the paper. Whatever that poker touches will be lit with the same flame.

If you have been hanging around with Christ long enough and you know His resurrection, His resurrection rubs off on you so that you are “on fire” and whatever you touch catches His fire. Paul says he wants to have this resurrected kind of life. His focus is on knowing Christ because Christ’s power will enable him to overcome the power of sin in the flesh.

But then there is another reason Paul longed to know Jesus in the power of His resurrection.

Before Jesus left to go back to Heaven to be with the Father He told His disciples that they needed power and that He would send them some:

*Luke 24:49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."*

But He didn’t say He was sending them “*power from on high*” just so they could brag, “*I’ve got the power!*” Look at the context; look at the verses prior to Jesus’ declaration:

*Luke 24:45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.  
Luke 24:46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,*

*Luke 24:47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

*Luke 24:48 "And you are witnesses of these things.*

Christians have resurrection power at their disposal so that they can testify of the things of Christ.

In Acts chapter three, the Bible says there was a man, lame from birth sitting outside near the gate of the temple. The man was begging for some money when Peter and John were on their way into the Temple.

Peter looked at the man and told him, ""Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The man not only got up and walked but he was leaping and praising the Lord.

Needless to say, this caused an uproar in the city and Peter took advantage of the occasion to preach Christ. Peter and John were arrested by the religious leaders...the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin and placed in custody. This takes us to chapter 4 verse 5:

*Acts 4:5 And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes,*

*Acts 4:6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.*

*Acts 4:7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"*

*Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:*

*Acts 4:9 "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well,*

*Acts 4:10 "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.*

*Acts 4:11 "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'*

*Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Notice verse 13:

*Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.*

Paul wanted to know Jesus in such a way that is only arrived at by being like Him and the only way you and I will ever come to be like Jesus is to spend time with Him.

How does one spend time with Jesus? Jesus is with the Father in Heaven. How do we spend time with Him when He is not physically with us as we go through life on this planet?

*Phil 3:10 – "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..."*

Paul knew that the only way he was going to get to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection was to *fellowship with Jesus in His sufferings.*

Was Paul saying that the only way to experience Jesus in His suffering is to die on a rugged cross like He did? Certainly there are many since the first century who think literal crucifixion is spoken of here in verse 10.

Paul was referring to the suffering that comes as a result of living a godly life and telling people about Jesus. This was Paul's calling, to make Christ known (Col. 1:27).

In 2 Timothy Paul told Timothy the kinds of sufferings he endured while making Christ known.

*2 Tim 3:10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance,*

*2 Tim 3:11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.*

*2 Tim 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

All who sincerely desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ will be treated the way He was as He walked in righteousness. In John 15:20 Jesus says, "*Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*".

While He was on earth, Jesus was opposed, mocked, conspired against, and betrayed. We need not be surprised when these kinds of persecutions befall us.

Jesus said, “, '*A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*". But don't think this promise of persecution is given to discourage us from pressing on down the path toward godliness. This promise is made to prepare us for the difficulties that are guaranteed to come as we seek to grow and be conformed to the likeness of Christ.

The Lord encourages us toward the goal of righteousness; He even adds a blessing to those who pursue it, even in the midst of suffering: He says in Matthew 5:10, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"<sup>2</sup>

John Bunyan (who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* from prison) said, "*In times of affliction we commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God.*"

J.C. Ryle (1856) – *If we are true Christians, we must not expect everything smooth in our journey to heaven. We must count it no strange thing, if we have to endure sicknesses, losses, bereavements, and disappointments, just like other men. Free pardon and full forgiveness, grace by the way and glory at the end – all this our Saviour has promised to give.*

*But He has never promised that we shall have no affliction. He loves us too well to promise that. By affliction He teaches us many precious lessons, which without it we should never learn.*

*By affliction He shows us our emptiness and weakness, draws us to the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, makes us long for heaven. In the resurrection morning, we shall all say, "It is good for me that I was afflicted." We shall thank God for every storm.*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/devotionals/dbdbg/view.cfm?Date=0827>

This is what knowing Christ is all about. It is much more than knowing Him by the forgiveness of your sins. It is an intimate experiential knowledge of Him; it is the sweet intimacy that comes from spending time with Christ in both the good times and the bad.

Polycarp (2nd Century)

Can you imagine what it was like for the church in Smyrna as they watched their beloved and aged pastor burn at the stake? Polycarp was his name. he was a disciple of Jesus' disciple, the Apostle John. One could tell it immediately because he possessed the same tenderness and compassion as his mentor.

Polycarp was Bishop of the church at Smyrna (present day Turkey). Persecution broke out in Smyrna and many Christians were fed to the wild beasts in the arena. The godless and bloodthirsty crowd called for the carcass of the leader – Polycarp. The authorities sent a search party to find him. He had been taken into hiding for some Christians but the Romans tortured two young believers until they finally disclosed his location. When the authorities arrival was announced there was still time to whisk Polycarp away but he refused to go saying, “God’s will be done.”

In one of the most touching instances of Christian grace imaginable Polycarp welcome his captors as if they were friends. He talked with them and insisted they eat a meal. He made only one request before being taken away – he asked for one hour to pray. The Roman soldiers listened to his prayer. Their hearts melted and they gave him 2 hours to pray. They had second thoughts as well and were overheard asking each other why they were sent to arrest him? Other authorities also experienced a warmed heart when Polycarp arrived. The Proconsul tried to find a way to release him too. “curse God and I will let you go!” he pleaded.

Polycarp’s reply was: “For eighty-six years I have served him. He has never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?” The Proconsul again looked for a way out. “The do this old man, just swear by the spirit of the emperor and that will be sufficient.” Polycarp’s reply was: “If you imagine for a moment that I would do that, then I think you pretend that you don’t know who I am. Hear it plainly. I am a Christian.”

More entreaties by the Proconsul Polycarp stood firm. The proconsul threatened with the wild beasts. Polycarp’s reply was: “Bring them forth. I would change my mind if it meant going from worst to best, but not to change from right to wrong.” The Proconsul threatened, “I will burn you alive!”

Polycarp’s reply was: “You threaten with fire that burns for an hour and is over but the judgment on the ungodly is forever.” The fires engulfed him. The witnesses noticed his faith and joy. He was finished off with a dagger. He was buried for the cause of Christ on February 22, 155 A.D. It was as much a day of victory as it was a day of tragedy. Polycarp illustrated the power of knowing Jesus intimately. Intimately enough to follow Him into the flames. As Jesus said, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

God may not be calling you to follow Him into flames but He is calling you to have an on-fire life for Him! In 2 Timothy 1:6 Paul tells Timothy to, “*fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you...*”

Open your mouth; tell someone about Jesus! Let your light shine! Live a holy and sanctified life!