
Partnering with Jesus and the Father by the Spirit

Knowing about Jesus and the Father and experiencing them personally

When we first encountered life as young toddlers we learned a vast amount of life's know-how through experience (sharp knives; hot heaters; and how to train parents...). In these circumstances, adults could go to great lengths to explain about the clear dangers but for almost all of us, knowing about something was no substitute for engaging with it. Our human nature wants to test and try situations so that through the experience of personally engaging we can truly learn for ourselves. Yet now we are much older than toddlers. We have found that the world is so complex it is much more efficient and risk-reducing to learn about something first, before we fully engage and experience it. That's why instruction manuals are meant to be read before we assemble and use a new item!

What did Jesus say about this?

The religious leaders of Jesus' day under the Old Covenant of Moses' Law, had this notion down to a fine art. They reasoned that if you knew the Bible and all the accompanying commentary from Rabbis, you would know about God and therefore know God. After all God wrote those words through the prophets and ignorance of these, his words, was the clearest barrier to serving him and finding eternal life. What could be wrong with that? Well, this is what Jesus said to them on this issue:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to ME that you may have life.
(John 5:39-40) ESV

So what do you think Jesus is communicating here? I suggest Jesus is opening something truly radical and it is the budding of the New Covenant. He is communicating that salvation lies in not just knowing about him and arriving at a set of life principles through searching the scriptures, - no matter how living and active these wonderful scriptures and principles can be for us. Salvation also lies in personally coming to Jesus, via engaging with him, experiencing him and following him. Yet because today's learning systems reward us for simply knowing a great deal about things, we can still be persuaded to think similarly like the Jews of Jesus' day. We can be led to believe that a deep knowledge about the truth of the gospel plus Bible theology is sufficient for salvation. Under this thinking all we have to do is to 'know more' and 'try harder' with self-discipline in our own strength to keep these godly principles. The Apostle Paul attempted to live out this thinking under the Jewish Law of Moses in Romans 7:14-24 and he ended up with a heartbreaking conclusion " *O' wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?*" Rom 7:24 NKJV

Yet the answer he gives in the next verse is clear: *I give thanks to God. He will do it through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Rom 7:25 NIV. Here, the situation has changed for Paul and this deliverance under the New Covenant involves both Jesus as Lord and God himself. There is now something significant that Paul wants us to know about God's activity with us. Furthermore, Jesus reached out to his disciples with similar insights just before he suffered and these insights extended to embrace the Spirit. With this in mind, look now at the following table which summarises these thoughts (...verse extracts with my emphasis in the wording).

| GOD (THE SOURCE) | JESUS (THE REVEALER) | SPIRIT (THE ENABLER) |
|--|--|---|
| <p>...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is <u>GOD WHO IS AT WORK IN YOU</u>, enabling you to be both <u>willing and able</u> to fulfil his good pleasure. Phil 2:13 NRSV/GNB</p> | <p>"I will not leave you like children who don't have parents. <u>I will COME</u> to you. (John 14:18)NirV ... "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him. <u>WE will COME</u> to him and make our home with him. (John 14:23) NirV</p> | <p>I will ask the Father. And he will <u>GIVE</u> you another Friend to help you and to be with you <u>FOREVER</u>. The Friend is <u>THE SPIRIT</u> of truth..... But you know him. He lives with you, and he will be <u>IN</u> you. (John 14:16-17) NirV</p> |

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version; GNB: Good News Bible; NirV: New International Readers Version; ESV: English Standard Version; NKJV: New King James Version

What do we as believers need to know?

For me, these scriptures combined in this way, create the primary understanding for how we will experience Jesus and the Father at work in our lives today. Paul saw that this is what God wanted his believers to know when he wrote...*for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you to be both willing and able to fulfil his good pleasure.* Phil 2:13 ie, we are not walking our salvation road in our own natural self and strength as Paul experienced in Romans 7. God himself wants to partner with you and me. Your salvation journey is with God who incredibly is within you, leading and empowering you to be willing and able to fulfil his purposes and pleasure.

Jesus directly expands this picture in John 14 when he says to his disciples who were seriously troubled by his imminent departure, *"I will not leave you like children who don't have parents. I will come to you.* (John 14:18) Later in that chapter he expands this coming to include the Father and to add that they will both make their home within anyone who loves and obeys Jesus' teaching. Thus Jesus himself wants to partner with you and me.

Finally, Jesus enlarges this to include the presence of the Father's Spirit as the friend, comforter and helper who will be there within us and forever. So the Father's spirit is the enabler of the partnership and Jesus will speak through the Spirit to us. The way I understand these combined dimensions at work with us and within us right now, is that the Father is the INITIATING GRACIOUS SOURCE. Jesus is His BELOVED REVELATION to us as the person the Father knows we can relate to. The SPIRIT OF HOLINESS is the intentional energy and power of the Father through Jesus which ENABLES disciples everywhere in every generation to personally experience their presence. ie, the Spirit is the gateway to Jesus acting now – the Father acting now.

Why, then do we need their presence?

Let's conclude by asking why is their active presence so important to our salvation? The answer I relate to is that my inner natural self still retains the dark voices of self serving, self focus, self reliance and selfishness. These are deep motives and impulses that seek to be independent of God - and in fact Romans 8 tells me they are hostile to God. When I invite Jesus and the Father to live within me by the Spirit and Jesus becomes fully Lord of my inner life, everything changes. I now have light shining in the darkness because I am consciously yielding my darkness to him. I

now have not just godly principles to follow. In Jesus, I also have a companion who offers an alternative voice of encouragement, power, goodness and love to the voice of my natural self as I undertake today's choices. Jesus can personally initiate guidance and insights that are unique to my life so that he can work through me by the Father's spirit to accomplish his purposes. He knows me better than I know myself and that is why I need him.

No analogy is perfect but let's imagine a modern one that I have experienced. Living life just from godly principles is like attending a large group exercise class. You hear the instruction guidelines from the expert trainer and you do your best to mirror them. The group class is truly helpful with lots of social interaction but you realise your particular needs and problems are not being focused on – it's a group class after all and now you have sore shoulders and lower back pain. Then one day the trainer offers personal guidance to you because he sees you are very loyal but struggling. You accept and in just one class you learn to set your shoulders back before you press down for the push-up and not allow your back to sink down in the plank. So, with this broad picture in mind, are you ready for some guidance from Jesus that touches you personally so you can more freely enjoy his group class at the breaking of bread? You are on his program. You just have to show up.

There is much more we could add here to open up the practical steps of asking, inviting, discerning and listening to the voice of the Spirit versus only hearing our natural voice. Yet first we need to simply embrace this awe-inspiring offer. The Father of creation and the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and His Son, our Lord Jesus, want to partner within our lives by their Spirit for our salvation. Amazing!

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