

# Knowing God

## Putting the jigsaw together, using Trinitarian Theology – Part 1

Two scriptures on knowing God:

**John 17:3** “Now this is eternal life: THAT THEY MAY KNOW YOU, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

**Ephesians 1:17** “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW HIM BETTER.”

According to Jesus to know God is to taste eternal life. It’s not surprising, then, that Paul prayed relentlessly for the church to know God better, nor is it surprising to see the growing interest in Trinitarian Theology today, because it too is about knowing God better. “Trinitarian Theology is the CENTRAL and FOUNDATIONAL doctrine that forms the basis for how we read the Bible and how we understand all points of theology<sup>1</sup>.” All points of theology would include knowing God.

And where Trinitarian Theology begins in its quest to know God is Jesus Christ. Fortunately, that totally agrees with Jesus and what he said in **John 5:39-40** because in those two verses he also tells people how to read the Bible and what the central and foundational basis is for all points of theology. It’s HIM. He’s the picture on the jigsaw box enabling us to know God better. The key, then, is “reading and interpreting the Bible through the lens of WHO JESUS IS<sup>2</sup>,” because **through Jesus we know God, John 14:7, 9** – and that very much includes Jesus in the Old Testament too, **Luke 24:25-27, 32**.

“The Bible confronts us with a God who has chosen to make himself known in Jesus Christ. In Jesus we meet God as GOD REALLY IS<sup>3</sup>,” and what we discover about God in Jesus is that God is a Father, Jesus himself is God’s Son, and together they make their home in us through the Holy Spirit, **John 14:23, 26**. From the Father in Jesus through the Spirit we come to know all truth, **John 16:13-15**.

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<sup>1</sup> Northern Light magazine, January to March 2010, page 2, left column

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 2, right column

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 2, left column

The “truth” about what, though? The truth about who God is and what he’s up to, both of which are seen in Jesus Christ. That’s why in Trinitarian Theology Jesus is still central and foundational, because he’s the one who reveals God as Father, Son and Spirit, and what they’re doing.

Jesus reveals God as a TRINITY, a relationship of three distinct persons all working together AS ONE for us. “When we meet Jesus, we find that he introduces us to his heavenly Father. In his (Jesus’) words and actions we hear and see that the Father loves us unconditionally....He also introduces us to the Holy Spirit, who is also at work to bring to our attention the reconciling ministry of God<sup>4</sup>.”

The Bible, therefore, is a jigsaw of God in which the pieces come together in Jesus Christ. “This lies at the heart of all other doctrines and forms the basis for how we understand EVERYTHING we read in scripture<sup>5</sup>.” It’s seeing God as he’s revealed in Jesus:

- 1) First of all, as a Trinity
- 2) Secondly, as a Trinity working as one for us, and
- 3) Thirdly, in what this Trinity is working at.

So that’s the frame of the jigsaw and the outside pieces in place. Now we can start on the inside pieces as to WHAT the Trinity is working at through Jesus, and HOW it’s been (and being) done through him.

And what emerges is Jesus as a HUMAN BEING. The one called the “Son of God” and “the Word” appears in a human body (John 1:14). “Jesus Christ has become one with our flesh IN ORDER TO be our saving substitute and to represent us as his brothers and sisters in the very presence of the Father<sup>6</sup>.” Ah, so it’s in seeing WHY Jesus came as a human being that we see God. And why did Jesus come? -

- 1) To be a SUBSTITUTE for us, and
- 2) To REPRESENT US

So in our jigsaw of God we now have the second person of the Trinity as a human being with the words “SUBSTITUTE and REPRESENTATIVE” on him. “As the apostle Paul emphasized, the man Jesus is the REPRESENTATIVE and SUBSTITUTE for ALL people – past, present and future. He is the vicarious (substitute and representative) human who has come to live and die and be

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<sup>4</sup> Northern Light magazine, January to March 2010, page 2, left column

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 2, middle column

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 2, middle column

raised IN OUR PLACE (substitute) and ON OUR BEHALF (representative) to reconcile us to God<sup>7</sup>.”

And where (exactly) does the “apostle Paul emphasize” this?

**1 Timothy 2:3-6** “God our Saviour wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the MAN Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for ALL MEN.” Salvation and reconciliation between us and God has been totally accomplished for us by the human Jesus.

**1 Timothy 4:9-10** “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance...that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of ALL MEN, and especially of those who believe.”

Note that it’s “GOD” who is “the Saviour of all men,” not just Jesus, because it’s the whole Trinity involved in saving us, **Colossians 1:19-20**, “For God was pleased to have ALL HIS FULLNESS dwell in him (Jesus), and through him to reconcile to himself all things...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” All of God was in the human Jesus, so that in everything Jesus did we see God.

So, what exactly DO we see of God in the human Jesus being our substitute and representative?

**Hebrews 2:9** “We see Jesus...now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, SO THAT by the GRACE of God he might taste death for everyone.” What we see is God’s AMAZING GRACE.

**Ephesians 1:4-8** “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his GLORIOUS GRACE, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the RICHES OF GOD’S GRACE, that he lavished on us.”

This is what we see of God in Jesus. We see God’s “immeasurable love and his unbending commitment to human redemption<sup>8</sup>,” described beautifully and clearly by Paul in **Ephesians 2:1-8**, where Paul points out how “dead” we were in our transgressions and sins, living to “gratify the cravings of our sinful nature, etc, “BUT, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – IT IS BY GRACE (therefore) you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with

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<sup>7</sup> Northern Light magazine, January to March 2010, page 4, left column

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, page 2, left column

him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus IN ORDER THAT in the coming ages he might show the incomparable RICHES OF HIS GRACE, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For IT IS BY GRACE you have been saved..."

We see God saving us entirely by his grace. How? Through the human Jesus:

- 1) Substituting himself in our place, taking our sins and sinful nature upon himself, and
- 2) Representing us before God, presenting his own perfect human life to the Father on our behalf, to show us that GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH US IS BASED ENTIRELY ON GRACE. God does all that he does for us as a GIFT, because he loves us.

And, what's more, God did all this as a gift before he even created us (Ephesians 1:4) and he still offers it as a gift while we're his enemies (Romans 5:10). In other words salvation is all done and dusted for us before we even knew it and before we even cared! Salvation is already ours, despite us, because of Jesus Christ.

That's why I wrote in my article in this same Northern Light that "Everybody's saved, they just don't know it yet." Actually, it's the second article in the Northern Light in which I've said that (long before I ever heard of Trinitarian Theology) because that's the picture I got from scripture too. Scriptures like:

**Romans 5:8** "God demonstrates his love for us IN THIS: While we WERE YET SINNERS (past tense), Christ died for us," and **verse 10** – "when we were God's enemies we WERE (past tense) reconciled to him through the death of his Son," and **verse 18** – "the result of ONE ACT of righteousness WAS (past tense) justification that brings life for all men." By Jesus' "ONE ACT," take note - not any act of ours at any time - "WAS (past tense) justification for all men." It's already done.

**Ephesians 2:5** - God "made (past tense) us alive with Christ EVEN WHEN we were dead in our transgressions." We were sinners going our merry way without a clue that Christ's one act had ALREADY saved us.

**John 14:20** – "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you." Note Jesus said "YOU ARE in me," not "you will be." They were ALREADY included in his salvation, before they even realized it!

But not all Christians see it this way, that salvation for all human beings, past, present and future, has already been done for us by Jesus Christ in his ONE ACT of being our substitute and representative. For instance:

- 1) Calvinists believe only the elect few will be saved (rather than all are already saved), and

- 2) Arminianists believe only those who repent and have faith receive salvation (rather than salvation being a gift).

According to these two views:

- 1) Salvation is either selective or conditional. Only a select few are saved, or only if we fulfill the conditions.
- 2) Salvation is only potentially ours not already ours, and
- 3) Salvation is an exchange rather than a gift, eg – we only receive salvation in exchange for our repentance and faith.

But salvation is not for the select few in **Ephesians 2:5**. Salvation has already been done for everyone. And in **verse 8**, salvation is not conditional. Salvation is a gift. Even the faith needed to accept the gift is supplied by God. Repentance is a gift too, **Romans 2:4**. Salvation from beginning to end is a gift, that was ours already before we even knew about it. Salvation, therefore, is neither selective nor conditional. “The gospel declares NOT the possibility or the potential of these things being true for us, but a REALITY that we are urged to accept<sup>9</sup>” – INCLUDING the fact that “Repentance and faith are themselves GIFTS of God<sup>10</sup>” too.

It’s hard, though, for some to accept that “Everybody’s saved they just don’t know it yet.” There are three objections I’ve heard, one of which constantly crops up in resistance to Trinitarian Theology, namely Universalism.

Universalists believe everybody’s going to be saved, that no one fails or loses salvation and God gets us all through eventually, which is what some people thought I meant. Did I? No. I have no idea if everybody’s going to get through eventually. Perhaps some might reject the gospel, but I didn’t mean “everybody’s GOING TO be saved,” I meant they ALREADY ARE.

“Scripture presents salvation as a free and unearned gift...all humans ARE justified, reconciled and saved (all PAST tense) precisely because they are ALL INCLUDED IN JESUS. When Jesus died ALL HUMANITY DIED WITH HIM. When Jesus rose ALL HUMANITY ROSE TO NEW LIFE WITH HIM. When Jesus ascended, all humanity ascended and BECAME SEATED WITH HIM at his Father’s side<sup>11</sup>.” It’s all been done – ALREADY. Everybody’s saved, they just don’t know it yet.

Which leads naturally to the second objection I heard: “But if people think they’re already saved, what incentive do they have to obey and change?” What’s to stop people just carrying on as usual in their sins?

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<sup>9</sup> Northern Light January to March 2010, page 6, right column

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, page 8, left column

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, page 5, middle column

Paul answers with **2 Corinthians 5:14**. Once we're "convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died," **verse 14**, "CHRIST'S LOVE COMPELS US." Compels us to do what? **Verse 15**, to "NO LONGER LIVE FOR THEMSELVES but for him who died for them." Christ's love becomes the driving force of our lives. How? By "Christ GIVING US HIS LIFE OF OBEDIENCE TO THE FATHER<sup>12</sup>." He now lives the same life of obedience in us that he lived as a human – sharing with us now the same love, desire, compulsion and faithfulness to obey God that he had. Jesus will also "purify us from all unrighteousness," **1 John 1:9**, and with Jesus doing that in us we're hardly likely to think we can just carry on as we were, are we?

The third objection was "But people can't already be saved because salvation only happens AFTER we repent and believe," quoting Acts 2:38 and Romans 5:1. Surely, we need faith first before being justified, and repentance before we're forgiven. But how can we repent and believe when we're "dead in our transgressions," and how can it be OUR repentance and faith that causes salvation when salvation is entirely GOD's doing? It isn't our role, then, to repent and believe. It's CHRIST's faith and obedience to the Father that saves us, not ours. Our role is simply to "accept what is ours ALREADY in Christ, placing our trust in the one who has ALREADY TRUSTED FOR US in our place and as our representative. The Holy Spirit leads us to trust NOT in OUR faith, but in Jesus<sup>13</sup>."

Repentance and faith are necessary, yes, but, "Repentance and faith are themselves GIFTS OF GOD," and secondly, "they do not CREATE or CAUSE a person's salvation<sup>14</sup>." What they *do* create, when given to us by God's grace, is the chance at last to "enjoy God's love for us and live out the new creation that God, PRIOR TO OUR BELIEVING, made us to be in Christ<sup>15</sup>." As Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:20-21**, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but CHRIST LIVES IN ME...I do not set aside the GRACE OF GOD, for if righteousness could be gained through the law (or by one's OWN repentance and faith), Christ died for nothing."

Once the Holy Spirit GIVES us CHRIST's repentance and faith, it's then that we EXPERIENCE and ENJOY our salvation, the salvation we already had but didn't know it yet.

Hearing these three objections has helped me, though, because I realize more than ever the value of good theology. Good theology helps us know God as GOD reveals himself. And God reveals himself through Jesus, showing us through the human Jesus that salvation is entirely a work of his grace. From beginning to end it's his gift to us, because he loves us.

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<sup>12</sup> Northern Light, January to March 2010, page 7, left column

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, page 7, right column

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, page 8, left column

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, page 7, right column