

Knowing God

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10).

At the Tower of Babel episode, the Creator God, Jehovah, gave all the Gentile nations over to certain created, wicked supernatural beings to be ruled by them. And God then took a new nation that He created, Israel, to be His own people. Israelites were to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant and take to the Gentiles the knowledge of Jehovah and the blessings He offered. Why? So that the Gentiles also would become God’s people. Instead, Israel sought to abandon their God, Jehovah, for the wicked gods of the Gentiles. Our verse in the Psalms calls God’s people back to Himself.

What exactly was the problem? The Israelites couldn’t see God. He’s a transcendent, Spirit Being, invisible to us and so unknowable. He revealed Himself however in writing, Scripture. They didn’t need to personally experience a miracle to know God was there; they had a true written record of His love for them, His promises, and His will. But that required individual Israelites to exercise faith, i.e., commitment to a Being whose existence, character and will is knowable thru the ideas or thoughts communicated by the words of Scripture.

Regarding this verse, “Be still . . .” means not only be at peace, it means *think*! It means cease endless activity, *all* empty pursuits, and instead reflect deeply on Scripture. That way – and that way *only* – is it possible to know God. And knowing God results in loving Him, trusting Him, fearing Him, and wanting to be like Him. Why? Because in Scripture, “to know” means to be in an intimate personal relationship. This word excludes simply having information about God or being aware of Him. Except for a notable few, most Israelites wouldn’t comply with the command to “know” God.

We today are exactly like most of those Israelites of that era. This verse powerfully speaks to us. America is a nation of idolaters. Idolatry, after all, is a matter of the heart (Ezekiel 14:1-8); it’s not necessarily statutes of wood or stone. Our culture is pagan and godless, utterly anti-theistic except for a thin veneer of biblical civility inherited by tradition from prior godly people. Our nation, celebrating its secularity, has rejected God, His Word, and His standards and values. It’s corrupt almost in its entirety. The great problem is, our evangelical world is no different.

Christians too have substituted for God a god of our own making, of our own imagination. Erwin Lutzer’s latest book, “The Eclipse of God” (Harvest House, 2024; \$10.99), documents and discusses this ghastly situation. We’ve created a religion that, although incorporating certain core biblical truths, satisfies our desires. Our god accepts us as we are, makes no demands on us other than to believe in him, and permits the delusion that we’re good, godly people on our way to heaven when we die. Our god serves us, loves us unconditionally, and allows us to live as we please without ever rebuking us. Our modern, American Christian god satisfies our need for a sense of the transcendent without requiring repentance, or transformation, or sacrifice, or *anything*. “Because we manufacture reality, we are our own god,” Lutzer writes (p.88). Our god isn’t one to be feared, after all, our god is *ourselves*. Here’s Lutzer again: “The God of the Bible has revealed to us that we have to connect with Him on His terms, not ours” (p.97). We thus should tremble at, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Our nation is a madhouse. Politics and culture have almost everyone not thinking clearly. Unbelievers committed to secularism are miserable. Some are angry. But what about believers? Don’t we in the Church realize that God really does exist, and that He’s sovereign Ruler? And He has purposes, eternal purposes for all His human creatures, that He’s fulfilling right before our eyes. We’re privileged to behold God at work doing something really great in the world. What’s that? Filling up the Church with new believers! All over India, Asia, Africa, and the Muslim world the Gospel is reaching the elect, and they are responding with faith and love. It’s marvelous.

The Gentile nations of earth are like the sea: Restless, turbulent, in constant tumult. It’s been this way since the early chapters of Genesis. And it will be like this until Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom on earth, a kingdom of peace, joy and righteousness. When He returns, all nations on earth will exalt Him. Until then we must live with wars, injustice, poverty, violence, hatred, and lies, lies, and more lies. But God still rules His Creation. He has exquisite and precise control over every situation at all times and in every place. Nothing escapes His notice, nothing is outside His will. He rules absolutely. He’s setting the world stage right now for Christ’s soon Return.

Politics and culture are only two arenas of madness. Almost every American institution is affected. But whatever folly is going on, indeed whatever happens in life, should fill us with joy because God has allowed us to know that He’s doing

something and we've been privileged to witness it, perhaps even participate. What seems to us like madness, chaos, stupidity, whatever, is ultimately the outworking of human sin, but God uses all that to accomplish very great purposes for His creation.

What the future holds for our nation is uncertain. But we're to be trusting in the Creator, the sovereign God who rules and who has given us both work to do and a hope for the future. And if we are faithful, it should fill us with inexpressible joy. In the Book of Job, the three "friends" were Satan's cruel agents to confuse Job so as to rob him of his faith. But in that horrible time of testing, Job's trust in God remained intact and he experienced at the end a joyous victory. Let us also respond to the terrible times that may lie ahead in a way that exalts God.

The above is to encourage us to be actively trusting in God, in His power, wisdom, goodness and love. We express trust by quietly saying, "Thank You for allowing me to see You at work." We express trust by continuing to focus our lives on serving Christ as we've been commanded to do, without regard to the "sea" raging all around us. No pious insouciance allowed. And we don't need to be up-to-date on the latest news, nor fill our minds with political or cultural commentary. God counsels us, "Be still, and know that I am God." This may be radical and totally life-changing for some of us, but then, being a follower of Christ is already radical in the extreme. We need greater commitment to Jesus and less absorption with the affairs of this world.

But I think that there's something else here. It's not explicit. I suspect it's this: Who can be at peace when the political or cultural circumstances that surround us clamor for some kind of response? Answer: Those who love God. Yes, that's what's implicit here. If—and only if—we love God can we comply with God's counsel. The Psalmist did. Others in Scripture did. Can we? Our problem is, we're way too invested in this world and all it places on offer to have spent the time and effort to cultivate our relationship with God, as we should have. We've forfeited the peace and the joy that we could have had. Like Esau, we've preferred a bowl of tasty stew for God's supernatural blessing. We only can know God if we desire to know Him, if our heart's great desire is God Himself.

God is beautiful. Although necessarily invisible to us, He is the most perfect Being in existence. His character, His attributes, are infinitely good, as are His purposes for His creation and His will for us. To know God is to love Him. To love Him is to trust Him, and to serve Him, fear Him, obey Him, and be fiercely committed and loyal to Him. All these are action verbs. We put them into action; we make these verbs alive by living out our lives based on them. So trusting God is thoughtful and deliberate. It's knowing who He is and leaving the consequences of obedience to Him. It's also willingness to suffer loss or whatever harm comes to us as a result of that intentional trust in Him. Paul went to Jerusalem (Acts 21) knowing that harm and suffering awaited him there, but he went anyway, trusting Christ for the outcome. He did that to model for us what trust in Christ means. It means purposely and knowingly going into dangerous situations to serve Christ, trusting Him for the outcome. As Paul was at peace about his decision, so we can be at peace. That's why, "Be still, and know that I am God."

The alternative is to ignore God, to be indifferent to Him, to be only lukewarm with superficial interest. That shows contempt for God, which is the worst thing any human can do. God is dangerous. Being interested in the things going on, whether in our nation or in the immediacy of our lives, of course is OK, but not if it means being *disinterested* in God. There is no neutral stance: we're either actively trusting in God, aware of His presence in our lives and thinking about Him and serving Him, or we're indifferent and contemptuous. There is no middle or neutral ground! We must use great care in how we pursue life.

Three more caveats that are related; they deal with our character: (i) We cannot know God, in the biblical sense of being in intimate fellowship with Him, if we're proud. Only the humble person, the one submitted to His will, can know God (Isaiah 66:2b, and many others). And this: (ii) We know God thru self-sacrifice. To know God is to worship Him and there's no such thing as worship without sacrificing something of self. Bulls and sheep *symbolize* worshipful sacrifice; only a sentient person who voluntarily sacrifices himself for God's glory can truly worship Him and know Him. Knowing and loving God *necessarily* involves personal self-sacrifice; the greater we value Him, the greater our sacrifice. And (iii), knowing God and His will for us also creates an inescapable responsibility to serve Him as He's revealed that we're to do that. We need to cultivate a servant's mindset. The responsibility we have in this bespoke age of the Son is far greater than what Israel had. We're to be messengers of peace and blessing, both of which are freely available thru Jesus, to others near us and everywhere in the world. They (or certain ones of them, anyway) want to know God too. So let's be faithful. There's not much time left.