

Self Disclosure & Knowledge

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Self Disclosure

"This is My Name."

*God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites,
"The LORD, the God of your fathers –
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac
and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you."
This is my name forever,
the name by which I am to be remembered
from generation to generation."
EXODUS 3:15*

In the modern world, a person's name is merely an identifying label, like a number, which could be changed without loss. Bible names, however, have their background in the widespread tradition that personal names give information, describing in some way who people are. The Old Testament constantly celebrates the fact that God has made his name known to Israel, and the Psalms direct praise to God's name over and over (Pss. 8:1; 113:1-3, 145:1-2, 148:5, 13). "Name" here means God himself as he has revealed himself by word and deed. At the heart of this self-revelation is the name by which he authorized Israel to invoke him—*Yahweh* as modern scholars write it, *Jehovah* as it used to be rendered, *the LORD* as it is printed in English versions of the Old Testament.

God declared this name to Moses when he spoke to him out of the thornbush that burned steadily without being burned up. God began by identifying himself as the God who had committed himself in covenant to the patriarchs (cf. Gen. 17:1-14); then, when Moses asked him what he might tell the people that this God's name was (for the ancient assumption was that prayer would be heard only if you named its addressee correctly), God first said "I AM WHO I AM" (or, "I will be what I will be"), then

shortened it to "I AM," and finally called himself "the LORD (Hebrew *Yahweh*, a name sounding like "I AM" in Hebrew), the God of your fathers" (Exod. 3:6, 13-16). The name in all its forms proclaims his eternal, self-sustaining, self-determining, sovereign reality – that supernatural mode of existence that the sign of the burning bush had signified. The bush, we might say, was God's three-dimensional illustration of his own inexhaustible life. "This is my name forever," he said – that is, God's people should always think of him as the living, reigning, potent, unfettered and undiminished king that the burning bush showed him to be (Exod. 3:15).

Later (Exod. 33:18-34:7) Moses asks to see God's "glory" (adorable self-display), and in reply God did "proclaim his name" thus: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished . . ." At the burning bush God had answered the question, In what way does God exist? Here he answers the question, In what way does God behave? This foundational announcement of his moral character is often echoed in later Scriptures (Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; Joel 2:13; John 4:2). It is all part of his "name," that is, his disclosure of his nature, for which he is to be adored forever.

God rounds off this revelation of the glory of his moral character by calling himself "the LORD, whose name is Jealous" (Exod. 34:14). This echoes, with emphasis, what he said of himself in the sanction of the second commandment (Exod. 20:5). The jealousy affirmed is covenantal: it is the virtue of the committed lover, who wants the total loyalty of the one he has bound himself to honor and serve.

In the New Testament, the words and acts of Jesus, the incarnate Son, constitute a full revelation of the mind, outlook, ways, plans, and purposes of God the Father (John 14:9-11; cf. 1:18). "Hallowed be your name" in the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6:9) expresses the desire that the first person of the Godhead will be revered and praised as the splen-

dor of his self-disclosure deserves. God is to be given glory for all the glories of his name, that is, his glorious self-revelation in creation, providence, and grace.

KNOWLEDGE

True Knowledge of God Comes Through Faith

"But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

JEREMIAH 9:24

In 1 Timothy 6:20-21, Paul warns Timothy against "what is falsely called knowledge (Greek *gnosis*), which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith." Paul is attacking theological and religious tendencies that developed into Gnosticism in the second century A.D. Teachers of these beliefs and practices told believers to see their Christian commitment as a somewhat confused first step along the road to "knowledge," and urged them to take more steps along that road. But these teachers viewed the material order as worthless and the body as a prison for the soul, and they treated illumination as the complete answer to human spiritual need. They denied that sin was any part of the problem, and the "knowledge" they offered had to do only with spells, celestial passwords, and disciplines of mysticism and detachment. They reclassified Jesus as a supernatural teacher who had looked human, though he was not; the Incarnation and the Atonement they denied, and replaced Christ's call to a life of holy love with either prescriptions for asceticism or permission for licentiousness. Paul's letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 4:1-7; 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:1-9); Jude 4, 8-19; 2 Peter 2; and John's first two letters (1 John 1:5-10; 2:9-11, 18-29; 3:7-10; 4:1-6, 5:1-12; 2 John 7-11) are explicitly opposing beliefs and practices that would later emerge as Gnosticism.

By contrast, Scripture speaks of "knowing" God as the spiritual person's ideal: namely, the fullness of a faith-relationship that brings salvation and eternal life and generates love, hope, obedience, and joy. (See, for example, Exod. 33:13; Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:8-12; Dan. 11:32; John 17:3; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 1:17-19; 3:19; Phil. 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:12.) The dimensions of this knowledge are intellectual (knowing the truth about God: Deut. 7:9; Ps. 100:3); volitional (trusting,

obeying, and worshiping God in terms of that truth); and moral (practicing justice and love: Jer. 22:16; 1 John 4:7-8). Faith-knowledge focuses on God incarnate, the man Christ Jesus, the mediator between God and us sinners, through whom we come to know his Father as our Father (John 14:6). Faith seeks to know Christ and his power specifically (Phil. 3:8-14). Faith's knowledge is the fruit of regeneration, the bestowal of a new heart (Jer. 24:7; 1 John 5:20), and of illumination by the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:17). The knowledge-relationship is reciprocal, implying covenantal affection on both sides: we know God as ours because he knows us as his (John 10:14; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19).

All Scripture has been given to help us know God in this way. Let us labor to use it for its proper purpose.



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