

Knowing Jesus Christ and His Character

Experiencing His Presence

Objectives

- ⌘ Develop a growing relationship with Jesus that is intimate and personal.
- ⌘ Answer the question "Why is awareness of Christ's presence so crucial for our lives?"
- ⌘ Identify manifestations of His presence with and in you.

How do you see Jesus Christ? When you ask this question, you are asking "What kind of person do I think Jesus is? How is He involved in my life? What is His heart toward me? What does He think of me and desire for me?"

These are probably the most important questions you could ask yourself. For, how you "see Jesus" will always determine your response to Him and enjoyment of Him (or lack thereof). Consider these three ways Christians tend to see Jesus.

1. As a distant justifier

Romans 5:1 states, "Therefore having been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." All Bible believing Christians will agree that we were declared totally righteous by God based on Christ's atoning death and resurrection 2000 years ago. But do you see Jesus only "at a distance"; as one who did a great thing for you 2000 years ago but isn't involved in your life today--at this moment?"

2. As a stern commander

1 Peter 1:2 states, "believers have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood." Again, we would all agree that Jesus calls His children to a life of obedience. But, do you think of Him primarily as a New Testament Moses, sternly commanding you to surrender to His "rules" and kingship at the threat of punishment?

3. As an uninvolved Spirit

Galatians 4:6 states, "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out 'Abba, Father.'" Yes, we would all acknowledge the New Testament truth that Jesus provides His Holy Spirit for all believers. But, is Jesus a sort of disembodied spiritual influence in your life, or is He a real person to you?

Your Love Relationship With Jesus

Record your thoughts on what these passages tell you about your love relationship with Jesus.

- "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Matthew 10:37

- "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." Revelation 2:4

- "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Matthew 22:36-40

It is obvious from these passages that Jesus wants you to love Him supremely. It is just as obvious that your love relationship with Him can "get lost" in the midst of doing good works for Him. Therefore, it is imperative that you focus on cultivating your love relationship with Jesus. This begins with seeing Jesus clearly; experiencing the reality of His presence.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to love someone supremely if they are in the foggy distance. We might love their memory or an idea about them or some memento, but we cannot love them above all else.

We can love, however, someone who is very close and near to us, even when we cannot see them--"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy . . ." (1 Peter 1:8).

Thus, your awareness of His presence will be directly related to your ability to love Him supremely.

Consider the example of Stephen from Acts 7:54-60, (especially vs. 55-56):

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"

What difference did the presence of Jesus make in Stephen's last moments?

The Reality of His Presence

The wonderful truth taught again and again in the Scriptures is that "Christ is here." He is with us. Jesus is with me. Consider the following passages.

"Jesus replied, 'if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" The promise of His presence with us is very clear. He is actually present in all of His grace, power, love, holiness, compassion, and joy right here, right now, with you (John 14:23).

"And teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." This verse is most often quoted in the context of doing the ministry. But let's not forget that the promise of His constant presence until the end of time is meant to encourage us at all times, whether we are doing something ~~for~~ Jesus at the moment or simply resting in the grace of His presence (Matthew 28:20).

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like king a who wanted to settle accounts with his servants." In the context of the Body of Christ and our "communion" with one another, He promises to be in our midst uniquely and most especially as we pray together. This passage seems to indicate that Jesus manifests Himself powerfully in corporate prayer" (Matthew 18:22-23).

There are many other passages which demonstrate Christ's immediacy; His "hereness." Consider:

"We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied. "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:14-18).

"The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11).

"For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10).

The biblical teaching is clear. Jesus is with you. But the question for most of us is "How do I experience His presence?"

Experiencing His Presence

Author and Radio Bible teacher David Mains has said, "The one preponderant characteristic of all earlier periods of revival is an overwhelming, continuing sense of the presence of God!" God intends for His presence to be experienced by His children. He has not left us unable or unequipped to personally

experience the reality of His presence. But, once again, the question is "How?" Take a few moments and consider what these verses teach concerning the "how" of experiencing His presence.

Record your thoughts in the space provided.

- "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

- "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:1,6).

Living By Faith

We often hear that we are to "live by faith." Yet, too often that merely means saying "yes" in our minds to a concept or truth with little or no experience of Jesus' presence as it relates to our wills or emotions. As Hebrews 11:1 tells us, faith is the assurance and conviction of what is unseen. Hebrews 11:6 teaches us that to demonstrate faith, we must come to Him (who we cannot see) and expect Him to reward us, most often by the experience of his presence. So how do we "come to" Him? This phrase is most often associated with prayer. In other words, we come to Jesus in prayer, asking and expecting to experience His presence. As we approach Him in this spirit of expectancy, He promises to reward us.

Or consider James 4:8, "Come near to God, and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." This verse teaches that if we draw near to God, He draws near to us. This "drawing near" on our part and God's is not a vague or ephemeral thing. It is real, solid; an act of our will to align ourselves with His will to make His presence real in our lives.

Also consider Isaiah 57:15, "For this is what the high and lofty One says--he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" This verse teaches that we must come to Him humbly and

contritely. We draw near to God as we recognize our need and inadequacy before Him. Pride and self-sufficiency will surely prohibit us from experiencing His presence.

The reason so few people experience Jesus' presence is that so few people expect Jesus to make Himself real to them. Why? Because their faith is predominately intellectual, not of the heart. Remember, faith is a "sixth sense" all believers have, but it is too often underdeveloped. So, we must practice, train and exercise our "expectation" muscle. We must draw near to God often, cultivating our appreciation of His presence as we humble ourselves before Him, meditate on His word, and by faith, thank Him for His presence.

The Manifestations of His Presence

How does Jesus manifest Himself to us? There are a great variety of ways and no list could be exhaustive. Here are a few.

- A deep personal assurance of His reality.
- An intense personal conviction of sin (Isaiah 57:15).
- Personal joy not tied to circumstances, finances, relationships, or ministry success.
- A deep, personal sense of being enveloped or embraced in His love and forgiveness (Ephesians 3:14-19).
- Creative ideas, vision, or concepts all in line with the Scriptures, but seemingly from 'out of the blue' while we are at prayer.
- Deep confidence and courage to do a hard or dangerous task.
- Deliverance from an enticing temptation, besetting sin or demonic oppression.
- Renewed enthusiasm for ministry.
- Emotional burden for the lost and the carnal.
- A new ability to understand and apply the Scriptures.

Now, take a few moments and reflect on how God has manifested His presence to you.

A Word of Caution

Realizing that most of us are already too cautious, there are still some obvious cautions we need to apply to this area.

First, the Word of God is our standard—the objective revelation to test our experience. God never leads us contrary to His word.

Second, test your ideas and insights by His word and the counsel of godly Christians. For instance, when Dr. Bright received the original vision for the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ in 1951, he went to Dr. Wilbur Smith and others for counsel. They confirmed that Dr. Bright's vision was from God.

Third, one "experience" in prayer does not a relationship make. Consistency is crucial in "experiencing His presence" and drawing near to Him so that He might draw near to us. As the old adage goes, "the question, isn't how high you can jump, but rather, how well you walk when your feet hit the ground."

Fourth, don't compare your experience with Christ to that of others. Christ deals with each of us uniquely (John 21:21-31). Some of the largest schisms in Christendom have occurred by setting "my experience" over "your experience."

Having heard these cautions, let's not forget the great biblical truth that "knowing Jesus Christ" is a matter of personally appreciating the reality of His presence in your life. As John 17:3 states, "Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Application
