

“How Can God Be Known?”

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

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The point of this passage is that God has made it so that we experience and participate by the Holy Spirit in his self-revelation through Jesus Christ, a revelation that changes us. Now I have the arduous task of telling you what that means. It first of all means that we can know God who is otherwise unknowable because he has revealed himself to us as Jesus Christ according to the gospel and because of that knowledge we somehow participate now in that self-revealing through the work of the Holy Spirit. To say that we can know God is a bold statement because we have all been enculturated by a philosophy of science that says everything that exists can be known and understood by us because we have the ability to know and understand and what we mean by knowable is that an object can be observed and measured or at least proven to exist by mathematical formula or by its effects on other things.

This cookie is an object that we with our ability to know and understand things can know and understand. We can know and understand its ingredients right down to their sub-atomic make-up. We can know and understand the processes of chemical interactions that take place as it is transformed by heat from a doughy mixture of ingredients to what we call a cookie. We can know its smell and most importantly it's taste. We can know it as intimately as taking it into ourselves by consuming and digesting it so that it becomes part of what we are; and if it's effect on us was profound enough we could say it has become part of who we are or because that cookie was so good I am now a cookie lover when before I was agnostic. The strange thing about this way of knowing and understanding, the object we want to know and understand sooner or later ceases to exist simply because we destroy it in our wanting to know it.

Well, that's a cookie. This philosophy of science begins to break down a bit when we apply it to persons. Rule number one: human persons are not objects to be known the way we know a cookie. To attempt such a thing would be cannibalism. The human body can be known as an object, but the human person, the human being is a mystery. Dana is not an object for me to observe, manipulate, or consume in my efforts to know and understand her. I think by nature we all feel very violated when we sense someone is trying to objectify us or manipulate us or consume us by sapping the life out of us. Dana is a thinking, feeling, and willing subject meaning he is a person. Dana is not the object of my desire, but rather the subject, the person, whom I desire to know. I can know things about Dana, her likes, dislikes, and habits for example. But there is a limit to which I can know of her as a person. I cannot know what it is to be Dana. If I

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could, it would be evil. That would mean I could objectify, manipulate, and consume her at the core of her being. When we call a person evil it is because they attempt to do just that.

Martin Buber, a Jewish biblical scholar and theologian from the early twentieth century wrote a book called I and Thou, in which he says we cannot really know another person. We can only know the change that comes about in us from having encountered that person. I cannot know Dana as Dana is in her person, but I can know the change her person brings about in me in our relationship and that is if I'm willing to let her person have an effect on me. We as persons know one another by the way we have been changed by relating to one another. If my relationship with Dana has not changed me, then I have not let myself be vulnerable enough to let Dana truly be present in my life. She would be just an object in my life. Her thoughts, abilities, giftedness, love, support, and even her dysfunctions all have an effect on me that changes me. She does not do this intentionally for that would be manipulation. Thus, we can never know what it is like to be another person. We can only know the change a person has caused within us by means of personal relationship.

Now let's talk about knowing God. God is not knowable as an object. God never offers himself to us as an object to be known. God cannot be observed and manipulated. God cannot be seen or measured. God cannot be proven by reason or mathematics. God is not part of what makes things make sense nor is God a part of the equation. God cannot be known by his actions nor the effect he has on things. God is not knowable as an object.

God is even unknowable to us as a person yet that is how God reveals himself to us. God is Person and what we know of God personally is the change that encountering him brings about in us. This entails that we must have an encounter with this who God does not have a physical presence that we can other than as Jesus Christ God the Son resurrected from the dead who sits as a human at the right hand of the Father and makes himself known to us by the Holy Spirit. So, we say God is spirit, meaning a person to whom we can relate – not a force, not an essence, not an energy; but rather a person. Just like being in relationship to Dana, we cannot know God apart from God's revealing of himself, a revelation that we can only know because it renders a change in us. Let us know talk about this change, our personal knowledge of God and its effect on us.

Paul says here in verse six that God spoke and said “Let light shine out of darkness.” He is probably referring to the first day of creation when God said let there be light. Please capture that image. We would say that light shining forth from darkness is impossible because there is nothing in darkness that can produce light both in a scientific terms and in a spiritual sense. But, God speaks the Word and it makes light shine forth from out of darkness. Now let us take that image of God speaking the Word and making light to shine forth from darkness and apply it to our hearts because he has spoken into our hearts the Word Jesus Christ by whom he has revealed himself and by whom he has saved us by the Holy Spirit through hearing the gospel. The Word is spoken to us by the proclamation of the gospel, the announcement of our salvation, a salvation that is made real is us by the Holy Spirit who is God's personal self-revelation to

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us and by having met this Holy Spirit we are changed, saved. We encounter God in his very person and know God as the one who has rendered this saving change in us through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit in accordance to the gospel.

This saving change, which is our salvation, is nothing short of being a new creation according to the promise of the gospel. This saving change one could metaphorically say is to experience the first day of the New Creation. We know God by the saving change we experience having encountered Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit according the gospel. The change that we experience is that we now know ourselves to be the loved children of God even though we were dead in our sin. God has made light shine forth from the darkness of our dead hearts.

That is what Paul says is knowledge of the glory of God that we see in the face of Jesus Christ who's glory shines to us through the gospel which is veiled to those who are perishing. When we see the word glory in the Bible think the personal presence of God. To have knowledge of the glory of God is to have knowledge of the personal saving presence of God as it shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ and touches us by means of the Holy Spirit to say “you are my beloved child because I have made you able to hear the Word of salvation that I have spoken to my creation as Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior.”

That saving change that happens in our hearts that comes about by encountering the love and forgiveness of the Father towards his children causes us to treat others with the same unconditional love by which we have saved. Light shines forth from the darkness of our hearts. When we relate to others the effect our persons have on others is part of how God saves them. The light of God shines forth from our hearts so that our personal presence proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to others. In my relationship with Dana, because she is a Spirit-filled Christian, her presence that changes me is part of God's working to transform me into the image of Christ and so it is with each of us. Friends, be aware that you are now part of the shining of God's saving light simply because he has saved you. You are part of God's saving “I love you” to every one you meet. Be ever so careful to let it shine.