

Living like you know God

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[0 : 00] Amen. Thanks so much, Hamar, for reading that for us.

! That we could read out your living word this morning, and we pray, Father, that you would be at work through your words, working in us so that Christ might be formed in us, as Paul said in this passage.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Back in January, I joined the gym, the gym down London Road. And I've caved in to the deals they were offering.

I've been thinking about it for a while, but January seemed like the time everyone joins the gym at that point, don't they? And they, no wonder, they do wonderful deals to join the gym in January. So I joined the gym. I got to enjoy the benefits of being in the gym, get a code to the door, get to use their exercise machines, enjoy a shower, an ice-warm shower, go to classes, access their Wi-Fi.

[1 : 32] If I paid a few extra pounds, apparently I'd even get some sort of, like, filtered ice-cold water as well. Didn't do that. Many privileges of being a member of a gym.

And in Galatians, in the passage that we heard last week, Paul was helping the Galatians to see, you've got many privileges, not being a member of the gym, even better, of being a member of God's family.

You're the children of the living God, the God who's made the universe. You get to cry out to him with the Spirit who lives in you, Abba, Father.

What a privilege. What a privilege it is to be a member of God's family. And this happened because Paul had come to them, he'd come to them and shared that life-changing news of the gospel.

He'd preached to them the saving faith that God saves you through Christ's finished work alone at the cross. An amazing gospel. And they had turned to faith, but the letter was being written because they'd abandoned the gospel.

[2 : 45] They'd forgot the privileges they had of being a child of God, and instead they were living some sort of try-harder salvation. Obey the law of God, they're told.

Do all those religious exercises that the Lord tells you to do, and then you'll be saved. Jesus' work for you isn't enough. Become like a Jew.

And yet the gospel is a very simple math equation. I'm terrible at math, but I get this. Jesus plus nothing equals everything.

You don't need to add to Jesus' work. Jesus plus something for salvation is nothing. It's only Jesus' work for you.

You stand as a child of God. I'd forgotten that. And so Paul wants to continue to address this as he continues writing in chapter 4, a passage this morning, verse 8 to 20.

[3 : 55] So have a look at verse 9. Let me point that out to you first of all. But now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you're turning back to those weak and miserable forces?

You are known by God, but you're not living like you are known by God. You're turning away from the all-powerful God who saves you, who changes your life from being slaves to sin to being his children.

But now you're turning back. Trying to make yourself some kind of saviour. The law cut some kind of saviour rather than Christ.

He's sort of saying to them, do you really? Do you really have the power in yourself to grant you eternal life?

Do you really have that power? The forgotten Jesus. There's more to my gym story than I told you.

[5 : 07] It goes on. I went. I went to the gym a few times. A very small handful of times. In fact, I can count how many times I went to the gym on one hand.

I enjoyed all the privileges of being a member of the gym. But I'd forgotten that. I'd stopped enjoying them.

I'd lived like I'd never even been inside. I had nothing to show for it, really. And that's how these Galatians are living. They found Jesus.

They found him as saviour. But they're living like Jesus has done nothing for them. And it's even taking over their calendar.

Look at verse 10. You're observing special days and months and seasons and years. Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

[6:13] Observing the feasts and rituals. Many Jewish feasts. Feasts of tabernacles. Feasts of Passover. A special year. The year of Jubilee.

You're turning back to these? Galatians. Many of them were Gentiles.

They weren't born as Jewish people. But now people are coming to them and saying that the real secret to Christian living is be like a Jew.

Jesus' work isn't enough for you. Whereas in fact, if you follow the Bible story carefully, you'll see all those religious feasts that were important for the Jewish people.

But they were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps most obviously, Jesus is that final Passover lamb.

[7:12] You don't need another lamb. Amen. So you're following all these Jewish feasts. And yet to what end?

What's the point? What's the point of what you're doing? Verse 11. Have a look. I fear for you.

That somehow I've wasted my efforts on you. It's all to the end of Paul thinking, maybe he's just wasted his time. Perhaps you know what it's like to pour your energy into a friendship.

And you just get nothing back from them. And that's what Paul's feeling about the Galatians here. I've just wasted my time on you.

Why did I bother turning up to preach the gospel to you? You've abandoned it. Why am I bothering to write this letter to you? Doesn't seem to be doing any good for you.

[8:15] I should focus my attention elsewhere. And yet we've still got another two and a half chapters of Galatians to go. He doesn't stop here. He doesn't stop at, I've wasted my efforts on you.

No, he continues to write. He continues to be concerned about them because he loves them.

Beginning in verse 12, I plead with you, brothers and sisters.

He's convinced they turned to Christ. He's convinced they're brothers and sisters and they need to come back. He loves them as his own brothers and sisters.

Verse 19, my dear children. When you start reading Galatians, you'll be forgiven for thinking Paul's just angry and ranting.

But no, he really does love them. He's passionate because he cares that they turn back to the gospel. The true gospel. Jesus plus nothing equals everything.

[9:30] And in love, he wants to say three things to them. Three things. First of all, live like you know God. Verse 8 to 11.

Live like you know God. These Galatians do know God. He tells them that in verse 8.

Formally, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not God's. They turned from worshipping other gods.

But now, verse 9, you know God. But even more. Even more correctly. Not only do they know God, but verse 9 continues.

Paul says, or rather are known by God. You know God because you're known by Him. The idea of being known by God, it goes way back to the Old Testament.

[10:35] So when Abraham was chosen. Chosen out of all the world to be the head of the Jewish people. That choosing of Abraham is literally God known.

God knows him. God is all-knowing. He knows everything. But God particularly knows Abraham.

Has singled him out as, in love, I'm going to choose him. And out of him, there's going to be these wonderful promises of salvation for the world. I know him.

I know him intimately, personally. I speak to him. And then in, so to show you another example, in Amos 3, verse 2, speaking to God's people as a whole.

You only, I have chosen of all the families of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for all your sins. The context of Amos is key. Go back and read that if you want to understand that for sure.

[11:37] But that word chosen is know. Chosen equals knowing. That's what it literally is. And so he's saying out of all the people in the world, I know you.

I have chosen you to be mine. And Paul elsewhere in the New Testament, in Ephesians, he talks about people of God being chosen.

Predestined before the world came to be. And that's being known by God. It's humbling to think that before you could ever do anything, before you were ever thought of, before this world was ever thought of, God thought of you.

God knew you. God knew who you were. Who you would be even. And said, they're going to be mine. Before you were able to do anything good, God knew you.

And knew that you would be mine. Even knew that the darkest sin would ever come in. And yet he knows us.

[12:50] He chooses us to be his. His very own. And at that we should go, wow. We're thought of, we're chosen to be his.

And then we get to enjoy that thought of being known as his own child. I've known many people throughout my life.

They're children of somebody. They're children of somebody. But only in the last few months do I know one as my own child. Who I get to hold in my own arms.

Who I get to see every day. Who I get to see grow up and do all sorts of wonderful new things that he's discovering about himself. It's a different kind of knowing.

It's a different kind of knowing to knowing anybody else. And that's how God the Father knows us. We are his beloved children who he holds in his arms.

[13:55] Who will keep us to the very end of our Christian lives. And bring us into eternity. He loves to hear us speaking to him. Isn't it awesome to be known by this God in this way.

In this loving, wonderful, Father-like way. So how could the Galatians turn to anyone else? Why would they turn to anyone, anything else?

If these are the privileges of being known by God. And the question needs to be asked of us as well.

Are you turning away from God? Who knows you and has set his love upon you. Are you turning away from the gospel?

Jesus plus nothing equals everything. And trying to put something else above God who saves. And so you find yourself enslaved.

[15:12] We could do that in all sorts of ways. All sorts of examples we could think of. We could do that with our money. Might live for earning money.

It thrills us to see money coming into our bank account. But when we feel like we don't have enough. That living for money becomes.

I need to work much harder. I need to get longer hours of work. I need to get a second job. And then we find we have no time to enjoy any of that money. And you know what?

That money isn't going to reach out and give you a hug. And it's not going to buy you into heaven. And so what good is it? It enslaves us. But here of course in Galatians.

The real problem is that they're religious. That they're idol of religion. Of obeying the law. Their focus is in that.

[16:18] How could that be in our lives today? Perhaps all our hope is in our church attendance. But then if we miss a week because we overslept.

It's going to make us feel a bit guilty. If our hope is in attending church to save us. Or perhaps it's not a big issue for us.

But you might get to the season of Lent. In the new year. And think I'm going to give something up. And that's going to make me more of a Christian. And if all our hope is in that.

Then and we fail. Have a sneaky bit of chocolate. Hope no one knows. And say we've given up chocolate for Lent. Is that really making you a better Christian?

Or if all our hope is in our prayer and Bible reading. And we miss a day of doing it. Then we're going to feel like maybe the Lord doesn't love us so much today. I know that's how I feel.

[17:26] When I've not read the Bible in the morning. Or not read it for as long as I think I should. I think everything that goes wrong that day. Is because I didn't read my Bible. And yet if I'm a child of God.

That can't be the case. So that's where we need to remember we're known. Known by God the Father.

Secure in His love. Tim Keller said these words in his commentary on this passage. He has set His love. God has set His love on us in Jesus.

Our knowing God will rise and fall depending on many things. But God's knowing of us is absolutely fixed and solid. It is fixed and solid.

Because there's a time and place in history. Where the God who knew that we were sinful lawbreakers. Offered Himself up to die for us.

[18 : 30] Was nailed to a cross in our place. Because He knew. He knew that if you were going to be His.

That you hadn't met His standards. And so Christ has died in your place. The death that you should die. Because He wants to redeem you. He wants you to be His child.

So it's great that our eyes will be set on that work of the Lord Jesus in a few moments. When we take communion this morning.

That thick, solid time and place in history. Where Christ has shown His love to us. And so knowing we are known by God in this way.

He frees us from that trying harder religion. It frees us from trying to satisfy our own and others' expectations of how we should live.

[19 : 31] Because God already knows us. I found this so helpful personally this week. As a preacher.

It can be easy for me to think that what God thinks about me is based on how good a sermon is. How polished it is. How good the illustrations are.

How good the illustrations are. How good the illustrations are. But God has helped me to see. No, my evaluation from Him is that He knows me. And that I know my Father.

And so if I stumble over my words. If my illustrations aren't very helpful. I'm still nonetheless a beloved child of God. And trust that He will somehow use my weak efforts for His glory.

That's what we sang earlier, isn't it? My worth is not in what I own. It's not in our skill or flesh or bone. It's in the costly wounds of love at the cross.

[20 : 36] Those costly wounds of love that say, His sin, her sin. It's paid for in full.

We're precious children of God's. And so we need to learn from the Galatians' mistake here. And not live forgetting this.

But live like we know God or are known by Him. And so instead of feeling enslaved by how much we've come to church over this last month.

Instead we come because we want. We're free to come and worship Him with brothers and sisters in Christ. It means that instead of feeling like we have to give up something for Lent.

We're free to choose to do that. In order that it might be helpful for us to spend a bit more time getting to know our Heavenly Father.

[21 : 43] It means that we'll want to pray. Because we want to be talking to the God who knows us. Who loves us. It means we'll want to read His Word in the freedom that we have.

Because we want to hear the voice of our Father. Rather than because we feel we have to. So that the day might go better. We need to live like we're known by God.

And that changes everything. That changes our perspective on living the Christian life. Secondly, we want to...

Well, the Galatians. They need to learn from Paul. And we can learn from Paul too. Verse 12. Paul writes, I plead with you, brothers and sisters. Become like me.

For I became like you. Why does Paul say this? Is this not a bit boastful and arrogant of Paul?

[22 : 43] Become like me. Look at me. Be like me. Let me try and convince you that it's not.

He is saying to people that know Him. He spent considerable time with them. Have a look. Verse 13. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.

And even though my illness was a trial to you, did not treat me with contempt and scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God or as if I were Christ Jesus Himself. Now, the Galatians knew Him.

They knew what He was like as He lived among them. And He is saying to them that you knew that I was once a Jew.

What once like the Jew of Jews, a devout Jewish person, taking seriously, following the law of God. But then you knew my testimony.

[23 : 47] Jesus dramatically broke into my life and transformed me by grace on that road to Damascus. And so now Paul was free to be amongst the Galatians and sort of live as a Galatian.

Gladys Aylward, you may have heard of her. She was a well-known missionary to the Chinese people. An incredible story.

Worth reading a biography about her. And she was once asked what the secret of her success was. And she said, it's simple. I became like one of them.

And she meant by that that she learned the language. She adopted a Chinese name.

She dressed like a Chinese woman. And she integrated herself into the community. And I think that's how weird to imagine Paul living with the Galatians.

[24 : 50] He was in Gentile territory. And as a free person in Christ, he wasn't going to insist that you eat my Jewish food.

He was going to eat the food the Galatians were serving up. And it was okay because he's free in Christ. I guess it means he spoke in that sort of lingo.

And dressed like a Galatian. In order that they might listen to the gospel. The unchanging, life-giving message of the gospel.

That Jesus plus nothing equals everything. And he showed that by his life. Showed that by the way he lived. As indeed we need to if we're going to effectively reach people in Brighton.

It seems to me that it would be no good if we were trying to reach this area by, in our meetings, using all sorts of complex religious language.

[25 : 59] Or singing all old hymns to an organ. Or refusing to use technology to aid our worship. Because people would come in and think we're stuck in some sort of time warp.

Why don't you stick a projector up there and use it to help you sing and help people understand your sermons. And so we can in some ways become like a Brightonian.

To help people hear the undiluted, clear message of the gospel. That Jesus plus nothing equals salvation.

And so Paul says, because of that, become like me. I wasn't insisting. In fact, I wasn't following all the Jewish customs.

I wasn't expecting you to obey the Jewish feasts to be a Christian. I was living like one of you and sharing the gospel message. Live out your life in the freedom of being a child of God.

[27 : 11] And Galatians, do you remember how much you cared for me whilst I was ill? How much you accepted me? Verse 15, where then is your blessing of me now?

I can testify that if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Seems a bit extreme, doesn't it? Eyesight is precious.

There's been a couple of times over recent years where my glasses have broken and suddenly I can't see. I can see, but I can't really see.

I can't read. I can't drive. Just not good. Eyesight is precious. And these Galatians, apparently they'd have torn out of their eyes and given them to Paul if they could.

It's very possible that the illness that he had whilst in Galatia was something to do with his eyesight. We don't know that for sure, but that certainly makes sense of what's said here.

[28 : 11] Nonetheless, it shows just how thankful they were for his coming amongst them and preaching the clear gospel to them. But they've forgotten this. But they've forgotten this.

And so verse 16, instead of learning from Paul, Paul thinks this is what their minds have about him. Verse 16, have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Am I your enemy? Paul asks, all because he insists on telling them gospel truth.

All because he's not telling them that false gospel that you can in some way save yourselves. You can in some way make yourself right with God. That appeals to human ego.

Okay. Appeals to our pride. And yet Paul tells them the free gospel of grace.

[29 : 17] Nothing in your hands you need to bring. Simply to his cross you cling. But it's not what they want to hear now. And so, Paul is an enemy in their minds.

Don't listen to Paul. Turns out he got it wrong. And so, Paul's message offends.

And that's a little lesson for us. The gospel isn't always going to be received with welcome arms.

Those who lead and preach at the front. Or those that lead, perhaps, Bible studies in other formats.

As Sunday club teachers. Sharing a lady's brunch or something. We're not always going to be telling people what they want to hear. And if you want to come to a church that tells you everything that you want to hear.

[30 : 25] Well, go on YouTube and you'll find something somewhere. Someone who will tell you what you want to hear. That's just comfortable. And nice. And appeals to your human ego.

But we're here to preach the word of God. We're here to please God in what we say. Not to bow down to the pressure of just saying what others want us to say.

Because if Paul did bow down and say what the Galatians wanted him to say, then he wouldn't be viewed as their enemy. Thirdly and finally, Paul says, let Christ be formed in you.

That's where he's going in these last few verses, 17 to 20. It begins with this. Verse 17. Those people are zealous to win you over. But for no good.

What they want is to alienate you from us. So that you may have zeal for them. In other words, those that are come in and preaching a different gospel, they're really passionate.

[31 : 42] They're really passionate about you. They want to build you up and flatter you. And tell you you can do all these things to make yourself right with God. They want you to love their voices.

They want you to be in awe at the zeal that they have. And their influence has become so strong that you're now viewing me as an enemy.

Be careful. Verse 18. It's fine to be zealous.

Provided the purpose is good. And to be so always, not just when I'm with you. It's okay to be zealous if the thing is good.

But these false teachers, they're not preaching what is good. They're not preaching what is right. Paul is very clearly zealous in this letter.

[32 : 44] For the good of the gospel. We need to be careful who we listen to.

We can listen to preaching even here. But certainly elsewhere on the internet, it sounds very zealous.

Very passionate. Very persuasive. And yet if it's not from the true gospel that Jesus plus nothing equals everything, then it's dangerous.

And we need to be careful. Because it's damaging. And so Paul says, listen to the gospel again.

Come back to the gospel so that Christ will be formed in you. Verse 19. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth, until Christ is formed in you.

[33 : 48] Childbirth pains are horrific. I've experienced that a little bit over this last year. They're not fun.

But at the end, a baby is born. And that's a joy. And for Paul, he is pained by the situation in the Galatian church. They've gone off.

They've listened to these very zealous people. They've gone away from the gospel. But Paul is zealous in persuading them back. And working hard. That he's going through pain.

That he's going through grief. It's tormenting him. But if the result is that Christ is formed in them, then it will be all so worth it.

It will be such a joy. If the result is they come back to the cross and live in the freedom that Christ and his work brings, then it will be worth it. Keith and Kristen Getty have contributed an amazing amount to modern Christian singing.

[34 : 55] We've sung one already influenced by them. We'll sing one later on as well influenced by them. And I particularly love their desire to see old hymns being sung well by the church still today.

And a few weeks ago, they released a recording of a precious hymn, Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross. I've been listening to that the last few weeks. It's a joy. I was just thinking, these Galatians need that song.

Jesus, keep me near the cross. Don't turn away from it. And how we ourselves need to keep near the cross.

We're forgetful people. How quickly we forget what happened on Sunday. But that's okay as long as we don't forget the cross.