A PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

KNOWN by God

Knowing Jesus and living
as children of God

Based on the message preached by
Cortt Chavis at Together Camp Meeting.

BEGIN HERE

Introduction

The longer we walk with the Lord, the more we should come to know Him. But over time, we can also become so used to the language of faith that we stop thinking about what it means. We know how to talk about salvation, take part in worship and recognize familiar Bible passages. We may have served through hard seasons and seen God work in ways we will never forget. Those experiences matter, but we still need His Word to speak into our lives today. What we have received in the past does not remove our need to keep responding to Him.

The question before us is whether we are known by God. Jesus speaks of people who will point to works done in His name, only to hear, “I never knew you.” Paul writes to believers who have come to know God, then puts the relationship more fully: “or rather are known of God.” These words ask us to look at the difference between knowing about spiritual things and belonging to the Lord. Learning more about Him will not answer that question if we keep parts of our lives closed to His work.

We are not trying to make ourselves doubt every spiritual experience we have had. We want to understand what makes us confident about our relationship with God. Do we depend mostly on how useful we are, how much we know or the place we hold in our church? Have we received His Spirit while continuing to protect attitudes that do not reflect Him? These questions call for honesty. Rather than defend our past, we can consider how we are living in the relationship God has made possible.

Galatians 4 begins with what God has done. He sent His Son to redeem those under the law so that we might receive adoption. To redeem us is to free us from the condition that held us; adoption brings us into His family as His children. He sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father.” The passage helps us see both what He has done for us and how we can come to Him as our Father.

Let us take our time with this study. A paragraph may bring up a question we have avoided. Another may help us see what a familiar truth means for our daily lives. We can keep the Scripture before us and answer honestly, without trying to sound like experienced Christians who already have everything settled. What matters is whether our answers match the life we are really living before God.

Main Scripture

Galatians 4 verses 4 through 7 KJV

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

GALATIANS 4

01 The day that gives weight to today

Certain days help us tell the story of our lives. Some come around every year and give us a reason to celebrate. Others stay in our memories because something happened that changed everything afterward. We may remember exactly where we were when we heard the news, whom we called and what we did next. A date becomes more than a square on the calendar when it changes our lives.

The day when we stand before the Lord deserves even more of our attention. Knowing it is coming can change how we live now. Jesus' words about "that day" lead us to look at the choices we are making today. We need to think beyond whether we will have an impressive story to tell at the end. What does the life we are living now say about our relationship with Him?

It is possible to believe we will answer to God and still keep putting off our response. We plan to deal with a hidden habit when life becomes less demanding. We will look closely at a difficult teaching when we have more time. We will try to make things right with someone once our feelings settle. Each reason may sound sensible on its own. But together, they can become a habit of putting tomorrow in charge of the obedience we are avoiding today.

The call that "today is the day of salvation" speaks directly to this habit. Today is when we can respond. We cannot go back and obey yesterday, but we can be honest now about what happened. We cannot promise that tomorrow will be easier, but we can stop making easier circumstances a condition for obeying God. This moment matters because His Word is speaking to us, and we have the chance to answer.

> *A small, honest beginning is better than a promise we never act on.*

01

That does not mean our past no longer matters. Our choices affect people, and some wrongs need to be put right in practical ways. Responding to God today includes being honest about those effects. But regret does not have to keep us from changing. We can spend so much time thinking about what we should have done that we avoid what we need to do now. The Word helps us face what happened and take responsibility for the choice before us.

We also need to notice how easily being busy can make us feel ready. A full church calendar may convince us that we are giving God enough attention. We can prepare lessons, help people and attend services while leaving a personal matter untouched. Those things can do real good, but they cannot answer God for us. We will stand before Him ourselves. The truth we share with others also needs to reach the parts of our lives that other people seldom see.

Let us think of one thing we have kept putting off. How do we usually explain the delay? Is there something we truly cannot do yet, or are we trying to keep control? We may not be able to change everything at once, but we can take a first step. We can admit what we have hidden, ask for help, arrange a conversation or return to a passage we have avoided. A small, honest beginning is better than a promise we never act on.

As we think about that day, we do not need to choose between ignoring the warning and becoming frightened without knowing what to do. Ignoring it leaves us assuming that our years in church will be enough. Worrying without responding leaves the same problem untouched. Jesus' words call us to listen, look honestly at our lives and obey what becomes clear. Taking that future day seriously should help us answer Him more faithfully today.

> *A small, honest beginning is better than a promise we never act on.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

02 Knowing about Jesus and being known by Him

In Matthew 7:22–23, the people speaking to Jesus point to what they have done in His name. They speak of prophecy, casting out devils and wonderful works. They expect these claims to show that all is well between them and Him. They sound familiar with spiritual matters. They know the name they have used, and they believe their record of activity will speak for them.

Jesus' answer, "I never knew you," is not what they expect. We need to let those words reach us before deciding that the warning must be meant for someone else. We may assume it applies only to people who are clearly pretending or know very little about God. Yet the people in the passage can speak confidently about spiritual work. That means we need to examine what we have come to accept as proof that our own relationship with Him is healthy.

This does not make serving others unimportant. Spiritual gifts, helpful work and speaking in Jesus' name are not being dismissed. The danger comes when those things take the place of personally belonging to Him. We may begin to think that because our work has helped someone, there is no need to look closely at our own hearts. People may thank us, and their kind words can make it easier to ignore something we know God has been asking us to address.

Knowing about a well-known person can help us understand the difference. We may know the person's name, recognize the voice and understand the work that person does. That person's decisions may even affect our lives. Still, none of this means we have a personal relationship. We know something about the person, but the person may not know us.

> *Knowing facts about God is not the same as belonging to Him.*

02

Of course, the example cannot explain everything about God. He does not overlook us or lack information about our lives. The question is about our relationship with Him. Knowing facts about God is not the same as belonging to Him. We can say true things about Him while holding back from the very relationship those truths call us to receive. We need to ask whether what we know is shaping the way we answer Him.

This can be especially difficult when others already see us as strong Christians. They may know us as dependable church members, experienced workers or people who understand the Bible. We might be afraid that an honest look at ourselves will threaten that image. But protecting what people think of us cannot bring us closer to the Lord. If something needs His attention, our good name is not a good reason to keep it hidden. We need a relationship in which we can face the truth, even when it is uncomfortable.

Let us notice what we reach for when a question about our relationship with God makes us uneasy. Do we begin listing the years we have served, the tasks we have done and the experiences we remember? Do we think of people who respect us? Do we compare ourselves with someone whose life seems less faithful? These things may tell part of our story, but they do not answer the question for us. Our response to God remains personal, even when much of our service has been seen by others.

The answer is not to try to earn His acceptance by doing even more work. If busyness has become a place to hide, more busyness will not help. We need to come before Him with our whole lives, including the places where our actions do not match what we say we believe. We need to hear Him and be willing to change where we have resisted. The relationship we say we have with Him must be allowed to guide our choices.

Let us think of one area where helping others has received more attention than our own obedience. What would it mean to stop making excuses for that gap? We do not have to dismiss everything God has done in our lives or make a dramatic judgment about our whole past. We can begin by telling the truth about this one matter. “I never knew you” asks us to look beyond how well we can explain who Jesus is. Are we answering Him with the way we live?

03 Making the Word our own

Faithful parents, grandparents and teachers can give us a wonderful beginning. They may have introduced us to the Bible and shown us how to pray long before we understood the value of what they were sharing. We can remain deeply thankful for their influence. But their faith cannot do our responding for us. We need to understand what we believe and why we are choosing to follow the Lord ourselves.

Cortt Chavis describes reaching that point after a crisis during his college years. He could no longer be satisfied with seeing the faith around him as his parents' or grandparents' religion. He needed to search the Scriptures for himself. As he read, Jesus' difficult words stayed with him. He wanted more than an answer he had heard before. He wanted to understand what it meant for God to know him.

Searching in this way takes more than finding a sentence that sounds like what we already believe. We need to notice what the passage says before jumping to the answer we expect. In Galatians 4, for example, we can ask who is acting, what He does and why He does it. God sends His Son. The Son comes to redeem those under the law. The passage speaks of adoption and of the Spirit of His Son within our hearts. Paying attention to these details keeps the words from blending into a general idea that we never quite stop to understand.

We also need to tell the difference between Scripture itself and sayings we have often heard alongside it. A phrase can become very familiar without actually being the wording of the Bible. An explanation can become so closely tied to a verse in our minds that we no longer notice where the verse ends and the explanation begins. A familiar explanation may be right, but we should check it rather than trust it only because we have heard it often.

> *We need to understand what we believe and why we are choosing to follow the Lord ourselves.*

03

Pastor Chavis's grandfather encouraged him to keep reading when the Bible raised a question. He pointed his grandson back to the Word rather than asking him simply to accept his answer. We can learn from that without rejecting people who have taught us faithfully. Good teaching helps us become able to read, understand and obey what God says. It should help us grow, rather than leave us always depending on someone else to be sure on our behalf.

Patient reading also helps us notice why we are studying. We may want a quick answer that removes an uncomfortable feeling without changing any of our habits. We may be looking for words to strengthen an argument we already want to make. Pastor Chavis describes a more personal search. He kept returning to his Bible, including while waiting in his parked car, because the question mattered to his own relationship with God. He wanted to understand in a way that would change how he lived.

We can look at our reading habits in the same light. When a passage challenges us, do we stay with it long enough to understand why? Do we slow down over words we find difficult, or hurry toward the parts that make us feel comfortable? Have we become better at defending what we believe than at letting Scripture examine it? Years of faith should help us take the Word seriously. They should not make us assume we already know everything it has to say to us.

Let us choose one statement from the main passage and write what it means in our own words. Then we can compare our explanation with the verse. Have we added something the verse does not say? Have we left out its purpose or softened a word that asks us to change? This can help us see what we understand clearly and what we have mainly learned to repeat. Finding a gap need not embarrass us. It shows us where to read more carefully.

We want to understand our faith and live it out ourselves. We can love and respect the people who taught us while recognizing that following God must become our own response to Him. We need to be able to say that we have heard His Word and are answering Him. As the passage becomes clearer, let us ask what it means for us now. What are we ready to receive? What do we need to let go of? What have we read that calls for obedience?

04 The Son sent to redeem us

Galatians 4:4 begins with what God did: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son.” Before the passage tells us about living as His children, it tells us how He made that relationship possible. The order matters. If we start with our good works or how much we know, we may think God brings us into His family as a reward for what we have become. Paul begins somewhere else. He asks us first to look at the Son whom God sent.

The words “the fulness of the time” remind us that God acted at the time He chose. We did not decide when the Son would come. We did not arrange the way by which we could belong to God. The chance we now have to respond began with something He did, not something we started. That gives us a reason to be thankful. It also challenges the idea that we can reshape His call to fit whatever we would prefer.

The passage continues, “made of a woman, made under the law.” The Son came into human life and came under the law to redeem those who were under it. These words connect His coming with the need of the people He came to help. We should not rush past them. His coming had a clear purpose, and the next verse tells us what that purpose was.

Verse 5 says, “To redeem them that were under the law.” Redemption means being freed from the condition that holds us. We need the Son’s work because we cannot solve that need simply by looking more religious. A better reputation, more years of service or a greater ability to explain Bible teaching cannot take His place. If we need redemption, we need to receive what He came to do, not merely improve how we appear to other people.

> *God’s purpose is to bring us into His family, into a place with Him that we could not make for ourselves.*

04

This brings us back to the warning about depending on what we have done in His name. Galatians gives us a different place to begin. We look first at what God has done through His Son. Our response still matters, but now we understand what we are responding to. We did not create this way to belong to Him, and our achievements cannot make His work better. He is calling us to receive the relationship that His redeeming work has made possible.

Both pride and shame can make this hard to receive. Pride may tell us that our faithfulness gives us a special claim on God. Shame may tell us that we must first become better before we can be honest with Him. Either way, we can become so focused on ourselves that we lose sight of the Son who was sent. We need to bring our successes and failures before Him without making either one the final word about whether we can answer His call.

How might this change the way we approach God about something we have avoided? We do not need to invent a better version of our story before telling Him the truth. We also cannot expect Him to change His purpose so that we can keep doing what we know is wrong. His work gives us a reason to come, and His Word guides our response. Thankfulness should make us willing to listen and change, not simply glad that help is available.

The sentence goes on from redemption to “the adoption of sons.” Let us notice where it is leading. God’s purpose is to bring us into His family, into a place with Him that we could not make for ourselves. The Son was sent so that people who needed redemption could receive this relationship. As we look more closely at adoption, we need to ask whether we are willing to welcome what it means. How will belonging to the Father change the way we see ourselves, trust Him and live each day?

> *God’s purpose is to bring us into His family, into a place with Him that we could not make for ourselves.*

05 Receiving our place in God's family

The words "to redeem" and "that we might receive" belong together in Galatians 4:5. They take us from what God has done for us to the relationship He wants us to receive. To redeem means to set free. In this passage, the Son comes to redeem those who were under the law so they can receive a place in God's family. If we separate these parts of the verse, we can miss where it is leading us. We might admire the cross without responding to its purpose. Or we might speak about becoming God's children as though we had made that possible ourselves.

This matters when we think about our own story. We may remember the day we began seeking God so clearly that we speak as though everything began with our decision. But our decision did not bring Christ into the world. It did not create the reason He came. God acted before we understood our need. We do not have to persuade an unwilling God to care about us. By sending His Son, He has already shown His desire to bring us to Himself. We can begin with gratitude for what He has done, then honestly consider how we are answering Him.

Knowing that God has acted does not mean there is nothing for us to receive. The words "that we might receive the adoption of sons" invite a personal response. We can agree that Christ came and still keep Him at a distance in the way we live. We can speak warmly about the cross while avoiding what it means for us. It is worth asking whether the truth we believe has become a relationship we are living in. Agreeing with a statement about God is important, but we must also be willing to answer Him when that truth reaches our own choices.

We can easily turn this into a question about someone else. It may feel safer to discuss whether another person understands adoption than to look at our own heart. But this is a personal study. We are asking what we have welcomed from God and what we still hold back. Have we received the comfort of belonging to Him while avoiding something He is asking us to change? Are we willing to examine our own response with the same care we would use when helping someone else? We do not need to rush to an answer. We need to be honest about the answer we give.

05

The words “adoption of sons” show us how personal God’s purpose is. Adoption speaks of being received into a family and given a place as a child. God is doing more than helping us learn religious words or become involved in church. He brings us into His family. The message speaks of sons and daughters because we are considering our relationship with Him as Father. This affects how we pray, how we receive correction and how we think about our place before Him. It should shape the life we live during the week, not just the way we describe ourselves at church.

Think about how we receive correction when we believe our value depends entirely on doing well. A mistake can feel like a threat to our whole place in the family. We may hide what happened, defend ourselves or try to make up for it by doing more visible work. But when we understand that God has brought us into a relationship with Him, we can come as children who need their Father’s help. The problem still needs an honest response. We still need to obey. Yet we do not have to pretend that we can manage everything without Him. We can admit that we need His direction.

Belonging to God also means allowing His Word to challenge us. We cannot grow close to the Father while insisting that He leave certain parts of our lives alone. The God who welcomes us into this relationship also speaks about the habits, motives and choices we bring with us. Receiving His care means being willing to listen when He corrects us. We can ask whether we want the comfort of calling Him Father while keeping the right to ignore His voice. If so, we need to bring that struggle to Him instead of hiding it behind the words we know.

Let us read verse 5 again and begin by naming what God has done. Then we can consider what receiving His gift means for us now. Some of us may have spent years trying to prove our value by being useful. Others may point to a response we made long ago while avoiding a response He is asking for today. We do not need a more impressive story before we can come to Him. We need to answer Him honestly. He has acted to bring us into His family. Are we receiving that relationship and allowing it to guide the way we live?

> *We need to answer Him honestly.*

06 The Spirit of the Son in our hearts

Galatians 4:6 moves from God sending His Son into the world to God sending the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. In both cases, God is the One who acts. We do not create the relationship simply by choosing a warmer way to speak about Him. He gives what makes it possible. The verse also tells us where the Spirit is sent: into our hearts. Our attention is drawn beyond how spiritual we may appear to what is happening within us. We can learn the words of family belonging, but knowing those words cannot take the place of receiving the Spirit.

The verse says, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.” We should keep these words together as we study them. Paul connects being God’s children with receiving the Spirit of His Son. They are not treated as unrelated subjects. We would miss something important if we welcomed adoption as a comforting thought but set aside the Spirit’s place in that relationship. We would also miss the point if we sought an experience without considering the relationship it expresses. The Father, His children and the Spirit of His Son belong together in this verse.

The words “Abba, Father” help us see how personal this relationship is. We do not need to add a complicated explanation of the word to understand the point before us. The Spirit of the Son within our hearts brings us to the Father. God is not only someone we discuss from a distance. We can speak to Him personally within the relationship the passage describes. This can challenge those of us who have become comfortable speaking about God in front of others but find it harder to speak honestly to Him when we are alone.

We may know how to explain prayer, lead prayer or use the words we often hear in prayer. Yet we can still avoid telling God what is really troubling us. Correct words can hide a concern we do not want to face. The cry “Abba, Father” invites us to ask whether we are coming to Him personally. What happens when there is no one else listening, no responsibility to carry and no need to appear strong? Can we tell Him the truth about our present life? Or do we keep trying to sound like the mature Christian we think we should be?

06

We need to be gentle and honest as we answer. One difficult time of prayer does not tell the whole story of our relationship with God. One deeply emotional moment does not answer every question about our obedience either. We are looking beyond the strength of a feeling we can remember or create. The passage speaks about the Spirit of the Son within our hearts and the relationship that makes possible. We can seek God sincerely without making a dramatic emotional response our goal. What matters is that we come to Him truthfully and remain willing to receive what He gives.

Calling Him Father also helps us understand our need for Him. We do not come as though God needs our gifts in order to be God. Pastor Chavis reminds us that the Lord does not depend on our preaching, singing or reputation. He gives us gifts to serve people. Before Him, we come as His children. This can reveal how often we hide behind what we can do. We may speak easily about the help we offer others while struggling to admit that we need help ourselves. We can bring that need to the Father without first proving how useful we have been.

We should also ask whether we have treated receiving the Spirit only as something that happened in the past. The call to receive the Holy Ghost matters, and we should take it seriously. At the same time, the words “into your hearts” bring the question into the life we are living now. We are considering the Spirit’s place within us, not only an experience we can describe. Does the way we approach God today show that we depend on Him? Or do we mainly point backward to show that we once experienced something meaningful?

Let us pause over the difference between knowing the words “Abba, Father” and letting them guide an honest prayer. We can bring one present concern to Him without turning it into an explanation for anyone else. We can admit where we have kept our distance, where we have relied on our religious skills and where we need to receive from Him. We do not have to force a dramatic moment. We can simply answer the relationship described in the passage, receiving His Spirit and approaching Him as Father with a heart that is willing to be known.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

07 Living as God's children while serving others

Verse 7 draws a conclusion from the verses before it: "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." The word "wherefore" means that what follows is connected to what has already been said. We have read about the Son coming, redemption, adoption and the Spirit in our hearts. Being God's children belongs to that work. It is not a positive label we give ourselves to feel more important. Our confidence grows from what God has done to bring us into His family.

Pastor Chavis helps us see the difference between serving people and coming before God as His child. Our gifts can bless others, but our place before the Father is more than the work we do. This matters because ministry can slowly become the main way we explain who we are. We may begin with a sincere desire to help, then reach a point where we cannot imagine our life without a certain responsibility. When a role changes or our work is not noticed, it can feel as though our place with God has changed too. We need to recognize when those things have become tied together.

Are we receiving our sense of belonging from the relationship God has given us, or trying to earn it by always being useful? Asking this does not mean we should become careless in serving others. It means we should understand what service can and cannot do. A task can help someone without proving our worth before the Father. When every responsibility must make us feel valuable, we place too much weight on our work. We also become less free to serve because every result seems to decide whether we are important. The relationship God gives us offers a different place from which to serve.

We can notice this pressure in everyday moments. We may feel resentful when someone else is thanked, become defensive when our work is corrected or feel anxious when a decision is made without us. These responses are worth bringing honestly to God. They may show how much we have depended on a position to tell us who we are. We do not need to hide the struggle or condemn ourselves for noticing it. We can ask why we have looked to a role, a gift or someone's approval for the security we need in our relationship with the Father.

07

The word heir adds another part to the picture. An heir belongs to the family and shares in what the father provides. The image of the Father's house challenges us when we live as though there is no place for us there. We can receive that invitation without assuming it means every desire must immediately be fulfilled. The verse says "through Christ," keeping us focused on the relationship He makes possible. The question here is whether we trust the Father and receive our place with Him, or continue approaching Him as though we are standing outside His care.

We can feel that distance even while being very active in church. We may gladly help others pray but treat our own need as a bother. We may encourage someone to come to God, then delay coming ourselves until we feel we have done enough to deserve it. We may speak warmly about His care for others while expecting little when we bring our own concerns. Living as His children challenges this gap between what we teach and what we practice. Can we receive for ourselves the truth we so often share with someone else?

Being God's children also means being willing to learn from Him. His care is not a reason to ignore His direction. It gives us a reason to listen. We can ask whether we have turned obedience into a bargain about what we expect to receive in return. Perhaps we are willing to answer one instruction only if He first settles another concern in the way we prefer. The passage calls us toward a closer relationship than that. We belong to Him, so His voice matters in our choices. We can bring our needs to Him while still listening to what He is asking of us.

Let us think about the responsibilities we carry now. Which ones are we doing freely for the good of others? Which have we quietly made responsible for proving our value? How might receiving our place as God's children help us serve without jealousy, accept correction without pulling away or rest without feeling useless? We can choose one practical change. The goal is not to stop serving. It is to serve from the relationship God has given us, coming to Him as Father instead of asking our achievements to prove that we have a place in His house.

> *The goal is not to stop serving.*

08 His name and our personal response

The adoption illustration helps us think about the difference between loving someone and entering a settled family relationship. Pastor Chavis describes people who care deeply for one another but still need a name on the adoption paperwork. In his illustration, writing a role such as “father” or “son” does not answer the request for a name. The picture turns our attention to Jesus and to baptism in His name. It asks a personal question: have we used our warm feelings about God as a reason to leave His call unanswered?

We should use the illustration for the purpose it serves. A comparison can help us understand a point, but the details of an earthly process do not prove a spiritual teaching by themselves. We do not decide what God requires by building everything on the imagined paperwork. We return to the Bible passages and the responses described in the message. The illustration helps us notice something we can easily miss: sincere feelings may become an excuse for avoiding a clear response. We may believe that because we care deeply, there is nothing further for us to consider or obey.

This question goes beyond whether we can explain baptism correctly. We may know how to discuss the teaching and still need to ask whether we have personally responded. Those of us who often help others can become used to explaining what they need to do without looking as carefully at ourselves. We may describe why a response matters and encourage someone else to make it, while leaving our own position unexamined. Let us bring the same care to our own lives that we would bring to a conversation with someone who sincerely wants to follow the Lord.

The name also reminds us who we are answering. We are not being invited only to a warm feeling of connection that remains unclear. The message centers this relationship on Jesus. His name is connected to the response being urged: baptism in Jesus’ name and receiving the Holy Ghost. We should not treat the name as something impressive to say while resisting the relationship it points us toward. Matthew 7 has already shown us people using His name as part of their appeal, yet hearing that He never knew them. Knowing the name does not remove the need for a personal response.

08

This gives us two things to consider carefully. We cannot answer the warning about using His name simply by becoming more confident when we say it. We still need to yield our lives to Him. But we also should not speak so generally about relationship that we avoid the clear response urged in the message. We can fall into either habit. We can make relationship sound so vague that it never asks anything of us. Or we can discuss a response as though it were only a step to complete, without considering the heart and life we are bringing to the Lord.

Galatians 4:9 brings the main question into focus: “after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God.” The words “or rather” turn our attention from our knowing Him to His knowing us. Paul does not throw away the first statement. He helps us see the relationship from the other side. Read with the earlier words about adoption and the Spirit of the Son, this becomes deeply personal. We are considering people who belong to God, not only people who can explain things about Him. This connection answered Pastor Chavis’s searching question. The warning “I never knew you” finds its answering comfort in being “known of God.” Our confidence must reach beyond what we know about Him into the relationship He gives and our response to it.

For some of us, the question may concern baptism in Jesus’ name or receiving the Holy Ghost when we have not yet responded. For others, it may concern the way we have used a past response to avoid obeying Him now. These are different questions, and we should not treat them as though they were the same. But we should not use one to dismiss the other either. We can take the call to receive seriously while also taking seriously the life that follows. Both our beginning and our present response deserve honest attention before God.

Let us tell Him plainly where we stand. What have we received? What do we understand? What question have we avoided because we are afraid of where an honest answer might lead? We can bring these matters to prayer and, when needed, speak with our pastor. Another person can help us, but their confidence cannot replace our own response. We are not trying to appear certain about everything. We are seeking to answer the Lord truthfully. From here, we can look more closely at the attitudes and choices that show what we are allowing to guide our lives.

09 What we serve and what must change

Galatians 4:8 helps us look honestly at the way we live as God's children: “Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.” What we serve shows what has a hold on us. Before we talk about what we believe, we can look at what we obey. What leads us when we are disappointed, corrected or left out? What do we choose when our wishes pull us away from the character of Jesus? We may reject the thought of worshipping a false god while allowing an attitude to rule our words and actions. This passage helps us notice the gap between the God we say we serve and the things we still allow to lead us.

Our personality can become something we refuse to question. Saying “That is just who I am” may sound honest, but it can also protect us from the deeper honesty of repentance. If our words keep hurting people, saying that we are direct does not deal with the hurt. If we pull away from someone to punish them, calling ourselves private does not change our reason for doing it. We may explain a habit by talking about our family or how we grew up. That explanation becomes an excuse when we use it to say that we cannot change. Are we willing to let the Lord speak to the very things we have spent years defending?

> *What we serve shows what has a hold on us.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

09

An attitude can feel natural because we have lived with it for a long time. That does not mean it is pleasing to Him. We may quickly notice pride in another person while calling our own stubbornness a strong belief. We may see someone else's bitterness while telling ourselves that our resentment makes sense because of what happened to us. Looking honestly at ourselves means using the same measure for our own actions that we use for others. Where have we given ourselves permission to stay the same? Have we decided that our situation makes us an exception to the change we believe other people need?

Jesus' words bring the question close to home: “the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” Cortt Chavis uses the picture of looking through a house to help us think about what we keep inside. We can bring our jealousy, hatred, bitterness and unwillingness to forgive before the Lord. We do not need to turn this into guesses about unseen activity. We need to face the attitudes we already recognize. If we know that we are holding resentment, that is where our attention belongs. Blaming an influence outside us must not become another way of avoiding responsibility for what we choose to say or do.

Paul's words “or rather are known of God” remind us that we are looking at our lives as children who belong to the Father. Belonging to Him should make us more willing to accept His correction. We do not need to protect every familiar habit as though giving it up would mean losing who we are. We can bring our habits to Him and ask what needs to change. Let us choose one attitude that often leads our behavior. When does it appear? What excuse do we usually make afterward? How could we answer differently the next time? Let us make our answer clear enough to put into practice.

> *What we serve shows what has a hold on us.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

10 Honest repentance and the change God brings

Jacob's story gives us a clear picture of honesty before God. Earlier, he had claimed to be Esau. Later, when asked his own name, he answered truthfully. Pastor Chavis uses that answer to help us understand repentance. We can learn from the picture without treating every part of the story as a separate step in conversion. The point here is the difference between pretending to be someone else and admitting who we are. We cannot honestly ask God to change us while only showing Him the version of ourselves we want others to see. Change calls for truth, including the truth we would rather leave out.

We may not tell an obvious lie about ourselves, yet we can still tell only the parts of the story that make us look better. We admit a weakness that sounds acceptable and leave out the choice that would make us uncomfortable. We say that we were tired when we also need to admit that we spoke cruelly. We say a conversation went badly without admitting that we wanted to embarrass the other person. Our words may be partly true while still missing the real issue. Confession becomes more honest when we stop arranging the story to make ourselves look innocent. What happened? What did we choose? What did we know we were doing?

> *Change calls for truth, including the truth we would rather leave out.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

10

An apology can stay so general that it never names what needs attention. We may tell God that we are sorry without saying plainly what we need to repent of. Familiar words can make us feel that we have dealt with something when we have only mentioned it. Honest confession brings the actual action or attitude into the open before Him. If we have been jealous, we can admit jealousy. If we repeated a story to make someone look bad, we can admit why we did it. If we have held onto an offense because it helps us feel better than the person who hurt us, we can admit that too. We need to speak about our response, not only about the original hurt.

Being honest does not mean inventing faults or accusing ourselves of things we have not done. We can say what is true without making it worse or making it sound smaller. We can also ask the Lord to help us see what we have been avoiding. Confession does not need to become a public performance. We can be busy in church and still keep hiding from the truth. What matters is whether we are becoming honest before God, not whether we can give a moving account of our mistakes. Even our confession can become something we use to impress people if we are more concerned with sounding sincere than with changing.

Jacob's new name gives us a picture of the change God brings. Honesty allows us to receive from Him instead of continuing to pretend. Giving ourselves a new description does not change a habit we still refuse to surrender. Let us take one matter from the previous section and describe it plainly in a private sentence. Then let us consider what obedience would look like. If our sin involved our speech, what needs to change in our speech? If we keep an old hurt alive, what do we do that keeps feeding it? Repentance needs to reach the place where the habit is lived out. We can bring our confession to the Lord and prepare to make a different choice the next time that habit appears.

> *Change calls for truth, including the truth we would rather leave out.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

11 Receiving the Holy Ghost with an open heart

The question in Acts 19 gives those of us with years of church experience a reason to listen carefully: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” Paul does not let their earlier belief end the conversation. He asks about receiving the Spirit and then about their baptism. The men answer honestly that they received John's baptism. They do not have to pretend that they have received something they have not received. We can learn from their openness. Our spiritual experiences often mean a great deal to us. We may defend our past instead of listening to a question about it.

Paul directs them to Christ. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and Paul speaks of believing on the One who came after John, Christ Jesus. The men are then baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul lays his hands on them, the Holy Ghost comes upon them, and they speak with tongues and prophesy. We need to pay attention to what happened rather than turn the account into a general lesson about being religious. Their earlier response mattered, but they were still willing to receive what Paul brought before them. What they had already experienced did not become a reason to refuse the next step.

> *The question calls for truth.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

11

We also need to stay with what the account actually tells us. These men said that they had received John's baptism. We should not assume that their story describes every person's experience in every detail. The question for us is whether we are willing to respond to the Word. Cortt Chavis's call is clear: repentance, baptism in Jesus' name and receiving the Holy Ghost need our attention. We can take that call seriously without adding details to the story or claiming to know another person's heart. We are not being asked to sort everyone else into groups. We are being asked to look honestly at our own response to God.

The Holy Ghost was received by people from different backgrounds. The gift was not limited to the apostles or one group of people. The disciples, the Samaritans and Cornelius's household are all part of this picture. Our background does not make the Spirit unnecessary. Growing up in church, having a believing family or spending many years in religious activities cannot take the place of receiving what God gives. We need to pay attention when our experience makes us unwilling to learn. If people have come to see us as someone who knows the answers, admitting a question can feel difficult. Yet protecting that image cannot help us receive what we need.

We can face these questions without pretending or trying to produce an experience just to meet an expectation. The question calls for truth. Have we personally responded to what we have been taught? Can we tell the difference between what we have heard about and what we have received? If we are unsure, let us bring that honestly into prayer and talk plainly with our pastor. We do not need to hide uncertainty behind confident words. If we have received the Holy Ghost, let us keep responding to the Spirit rather than treating the experience as a subject we have finished. Asking how we are living now does not make the gift less important. Our lives should show the relationship we say we have and the Spirit we have received.

> *The question calls for truth.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

12 Responding to the God who knows us

Jesus asks His disciples who people say He is. Then He brings the question directly to them: “But whom say ye that I am?” It is one thing to repeat what others think. It is another to answer for ourselves. We may explain other people's beliefs while avoiding what we personally believe and confess. Peter answers, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then speaks to Peter personally. Cortt Chavis points to this exchange as a picture of knowing and being known within a relationship. This is one lesson we can draw from the passage, without claiming it is all the passage means. It helps us think about answering the Lord for ourselves and listening to what He says to us.

We can learn to speak correctly about God while leaving His truth far away from our everyday lives. The question becomes harder when it reaches our own choices. What does the truth we confess ask of us today? Does it challenge a decision we have already made? Does it touch a habit we hoped to leave alone? Our faith becomes personal when we allow what we believe to shape something we would rather handle our own way. We need to let the Lord's question reach further than our ability to give the answer we know is expected.

> *A quiet act of obedience still matters.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

12

Being known by God also changes how we listen to His guidance. We do not come before an object that cannot hear or use His name only to give weight to our requests. We come to a Father who hears, a Shepherd who guides and a Lord who speaks to us. This relationship is about more than getting what we want. A child can ask and also listen. We can bring our needs honestly while staying willing for Him to correct our wishes and choices. If all our prayer is spent asking for the outcome we prefer, we may pay little attention to the obedience He has already put before us.

Our response does not have to be dramatic to be real. We may need to stop defending an attitude, return to a passage we have only repeated from memory or ask an honest question about baptism or the Holy Ghost. We may need to change something that no one in the congregation will ever see. A quiet act of obedience still matters. The warning at the beginning of the study concerned people who could point to impressive works. We should therefore be careful about measuring faithfulness only by what can be seen or announced. Ordinary choices reveal our hearts, even when no one sees or praises our response.

As we near the end of this study, let us ask whether we have kept the question personal. We could finish better able to talk about our relationship with God while still refusing the same change. We can instead name what we have seen and decide how to respond. Writing down an intention will not change us by itself. Still, we can refuse to hide behind plans that never become actions. What clear step of obedience belongs to today? What must we stop excusing? What do we need to receive? What truth should shape our next conversation, decision or private response? These questions help us carry what we have learned into the life we actually live.

> *A quiet act of obedience still matters.*

PERSONAL RESPONSE

BRING THE STUDY HOME

Reflection

Let us take time to look back over the study without rushing to reassure ourselves that everything is fine. We have considered knowing about Jesus and being known by Him, redemption and adoption, the Spirit of the Son within our hearts and our honest response to Him. Which truth has been hardest for us to consider personally? We can begin there. We may notice that we become distracted, start arguing or quickly decide that a section is meant for someone else. Discomfort does not give us every answer, but we can ask why we want to avoid a question.

We can write a short account of why we feel confident about our relationship with God. What do we mention first? Do we begin with our church responsibilities, years of attendance or knowledge? Do we describe past experiences while avoiding how we live now? Can we speak honestly about both God's work in us and the places where we still need to respond? We do not need to deny what He has done. We need to stop using what He has done as a reason to hold back something He is asking us to surrender.

Finally, let us return to “Abba, Father.” We are bringing our lives before the One who has made a way for us to belong to Him. We can tell Him the truth without covering it up. Let us name something that needs confession, a truth we need to consider again and a response that must become action. Written answers can help us remember after the moment has passed. Then let us pray about those real matters instead of replacing them with a general request to do better.

Conclusion

Being known by God reaches further than being familiar with church and Christian teaching. The Father has acted to redeem us, bring us into His family and give us the Spirit of His Son. We cannot replace our response with church experience, borrowed words or visible activity. We can receive the Word for ourselves, answer the call to repentance, baptism and the Holy Ghost, and let the character of Jesus challenge what we have excused. The day when we stand before Him gives weight to today. Let us respond while the opportunity is before us.

RECALL AND REMEMBER

Fill in the Blanks

Let us complete these statements from the study. Some use the quoted KJV words; others help us remember what we have learned. We can return to the relevant section when we need help understanding an answer.

1. Jesus' searching statement is, “I never _____ you.”
2. Knowing someone's name does not by itself establish a _____.
3. Our faith needs to be rooted in the _____.
4. God sent forth His Son when the fulness of the _____ was come.
5. The Son was made of a woman and made under the _____.
6. He came to _____ those who were under the law.
7. God's purpose includes our receiving the _____ of sons.
8. God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our _____.
9. The Spirit of His Son cries, “Abba, _____.”
10. A son is also an _____ of God through Christ.
11. Paul writes, “or rather are _____ of God.”
12. We should not use personality as an excuse for refusing to _____.
13. Honest confession means more than a general _____.
14. Jacob's truthful answer gives us a picture of _____.
15. The men in Acts 19 said they had received _____ baptism.
16. They were then baptized in the name of the Lord _____.
17. Paul asked whether they had received the Holy _____ since they believed.
18. Our next step should move beyond intention into _____.

Answers: 1. knew; 2. relationship; 3. Word; 4. time; 5. law; 6. redeem; 7. adoption; 8. hearts; 9. Father; 10. heir; 11. known; 12. change; 13. apology; 14. repentance; 15. John's; 16. Jesus; 17. Ghost; 18. obedience.

ANSWER WITH YOUR LIFE

Invitation to Act

Let us close by responding to one thing this study has made clear. We can name it plainly before God, without making it worse and without making excuses. If our response concerns baptism in Jesus' name or receiving the Holy Ghost, let us seek prayer and speak directly with our pastor. If we have already received these experiences, let us consider what surrender looks like in our lives now. We do not need to make someone else's situation the focus. The question before us is whether we are willing to answer the Lord ourselves.

Let us choose a step we can actually take. It may be an honest confession, a different response in a familiar disagreement or time spent returning to a passage we need to understand. We can decide when to take that step and think about what might tempt us to put it off. If another person is involved, our aim should be to deal with our own actions, not to use spiritual language to make demands of them.

Before we leave the study, let us bring that decision to the Father. We can ask Him to help us stay honest when change is uncomfortable and alert when old habits return. Then let us look for the next ordinary chance to obey. Now we can answer Him through the life we bring before Him today.

MY NEXT STEP

Now we can answer Him through the life we bring before Him today.