

## 6:1 KNOWING CHRIST

**The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.**

*Isaiah 11:2*

**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.**

*John 10:27-28*

Knowing Christ is a matter not of the head but of the heart. Jesus said that his sheep follow him because they know his voice (John 10:4). He is the good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. ‘I know my sheep and my sheep know me’ (John 10:14).

Eternal life is not given as a reward for seeking God or following his commandments. ‘This is eternal life,’ says Jesus in his intimate prayer to the Father, ‘that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’ (John 17:3). ‘The Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world’ (1 John 4:14).

In the bitter Antarctic winter, emperor penguin chicks are kept alive on their father’s feet until their mother returns after weeks or even months with food for the family. But how is she to find them among thousands of other penguins? It is because she recognises the call of her mate and homes in on him. His voice is unique and unmissable.

What does it mean to hear Jesus’ voice? Is it a blinding revelation like Paul’s vision on the Damascus road, or a mystic sense of union with him, or literally hearing a heavenly voice as Jesus did at his baptism? No – ‘Jesus’ voice is “heard” when his claim is acknowledged, his promise trusted, and his call answered’ (J I Packer *Knowing God*).

The work of the Spirit is to point to Christ and impart his knowledge. To bring home to me Jesus’ claim (‘I am the good Shepherd’), to show me his promise (‘I give them eternal life’), and to keep me hearing his call (‘Follow me’), no matter how long it takes or how wild the weather.

*Thank you, Lord, that you have never stopped calling. Forgive my slowness to respond. There are so many distractions. But it is your voice I want to hear.*

## 6:2 THE RIGHTNESS OF JESUS

**No one can deny how great is the secret of our religion: he appeared in human form, was shown to be right by the Spirit, and was seen by angels. He was preached among the nations, was believed in throughout the world, and was taken up to heaven.**

*1 Timothy 3:16 GNB*

**He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.**

*1 Peter 2:22, quoting Isaiah 53:9*

Paul is reminding Timothy of what may have been an early Christian creed, which emphasises how the church is the guardian of a precious and mysterious truth – that Jesus is God appearing ‘in human form’. But then he would need to have lived a perfect life on earth, in contrast to the Greek stories of gods taking various forms in order to commit immoral acts like rape and theft. Did he?

Jesus said, ‘I always do what pleases my Father’ (John 8:29). Others agreed. John said ‘In him is no sin’ (1 John 3:5). ‘This man has done nothing wrong,’ said the criminal on the next-door cross (Luke 23:41). Paul says, ‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Hebrews calls him ‘one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin’ (4:15).

How was this possible? ‘He was shown to be right (or fully vindicated) by the Spirit.’ He was perfectly adjusted to the Father’s will through the indwelling Spirit. True, that Spirit might lead him into acts which might seem intemperate, such as the assault on the moneylenders in the Temple or his bitter words against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees; but righteous anger is very different from irrational loss of temper. Jesus lived a blameless and selfless life; he has been called ‘the man for others’; and it was ‘through the eternal Spirit’ that he ‘offered himself unblemished to God’ and ‘did away with sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Hebrews 9:14, 26).

*‘Let those who love the Lord hate evil’ (Psalm 97:10). If I claim to follow Christ, yet have little compunction in yielding to the insistence of my ego, how close am I to him in actual fact? Help me, Lord, by the same Spirit that dwelt in you, to live my life for others and for you.*

### 6:3 THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

**Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself to God.**  
*Hebrews 9:14*

**Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come – it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.'**  
*Psalm 40:7-8*

There is a mysterious statement in Hebrews 5:8-9 about the Son of God 'learning obedience through what he suffered' and so 'being made perfect'. It seems to be a reference to Gethsemane, but also to the times of testing Jesus had to go through. As a matter of solid fact, Jesus always was perfectly obedient to his Father, but it could have been otherwise. In that way he marked out a path for us.

How did he do it, and how can we do it? Surely as the unique Son of God he had an advantage? Yes, but that doesn't let us off the hook because we too 'are all children of God through faith' (Galatians 3:26). We have the same operating instructions as he had.

When a car is designed, it is taken to somewhere like Death Valley in the United States to be put through extreme manoeuvres and batterings that no car should ordinarily have to meet. Jesus experienced temptations (to take a short cut to world domination or to float down from the Temple pinnacle) that we are unlikely to face. Finally he went through the valley of death for all of us.

He relied, as we have to, on the word of God in the Bible ('the scroll') and the 'eternal' Holy Spirit who kept him in touch with heavenly realities through all the dust and smoke of life on earth. So when he said, 'I always do what pleases him' (John 8:29), it was the sober read-out of the testing schedule he was being put through. But all the same, he is the prototype of the model I am meant to be.

*The Psalmist knew moral failure and spiritual oppression. He had to go through times of weakness and uncertainty. So he gives us a model prayer: 'Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground' (Psalm 143:10).*

### 6:4 ON STRIKE

**In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit.**  
*Isaiah 63:9-10*

**He said, 'This is the resting-place, let the weary rest'; and, 'This is the place of repose' – but they would not listen. So then, the word of the Lord to them will become: do this, do that, a rule for this, a rule for that....**  
*Isaiah 28:12-13*

We are facing the inconvenience and expense of yet another strike on the railways. People's vital interests are going to be affected on both sides of the dispute. Why can't management and work-force hammer out a working agreement which avoids all this hassle?

The Lord is not and never could be our personal first-class luxury travel compartment; if we think he is, something has gone seriously wrong. He is much better than that: he is our place of rest at the centre of our beings, the point of tranquillity in the eye of the tornado. 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). But do we listen?

Jesus' complaint against the Jewish teachers of his day was that they searched the Scriptures for the way to eternal life, yet they wouldn't come to him (John 5:39-40). So the very words of God which were designed to give them life and peace became a cause of contention and strife. Word and Spirit were in open disharmony.

We have to consider the possibility that the Spirit gone on strike in our life. One sign might be that the Bible has become a rule-book tying us down rather than setting us free. Could it be that 'the mind of the flesh' has taken over from 'the mind of the Spirit', making us 'hostile to God' and unable to please him (Romans 8:5-9)?

*What is my hidden agenda in my service for God? Have I thrown off Jesus' gentle and restful yoke? Am I on some kind of one-person strike because he won't hear my legitimate complaint? Maybe I need to read a passage like Lamentations 3:19-33 to get my grievances into proper perspective. 'His compassions never fail; great is your faithfulness.'*

## 6:5 IS FAITH A GIFT?

**He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.**

*Galatians 3:14*

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.**

*Ephesians 2:8-9*

‘I wish I had your faith.’ How do we reply when (however rarely!) we hear this said to us? Something like, ‘Well, maybe it’s a good thing you haven’t, but you can have the Person I believe in.’

Paul’s point in Ephesians is that everything to do with our salvation comes by God’s grace, not as a result of an achievement or spiritual talent of our own of which we can be proud. ‘Faith is two empty hands held out to receive the riches of Christ,’ as the saying goes.

Included in those riches is the Holy Spirit. Just as faith is not a special gift for some and not others, so the Spirit is given to all who believe without distinction. The first apostles were astonished that Gentiles, complete outsiders and no-hopers, should be admitted to the kingdom of Christ on exactly the same terms as Jews, who had been God’s favoured and chosen people for centuries (Acts 10:44-48).

So why do some folk seem to have faith while others don’t? Why does the message of Christ so often fall on stony ground? The hardest thing for most of us is to admit that we do in fact have two empty hands, that we are no-hopers without Christ.

It may be another of these Divine paradoxes, that we need faith to receive the Spirit, while at the same time we need the Spirit to enable us to have faith.

*Lord, I depend on you to give me everything I need for the life of faith. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is simply to believe. All I have is two empty hands. Please fill them with yourself today.*

## 6:6 JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me ... he has sent me.**

*Luke 4:18*

**The one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’**

*Revelation 21:5 NRSV*

Wherever Jesus arrived in a town or village, he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom and healed every kind of disease and illness (Matthew 9:35). This was because he had the Spirit of God ‘upon’ him and ‘anointing’ him to bring transformation and wholeness. He had a unique authority straight from the very throne of God.

When Jesus is on the case, nothing can stay the same. In all the great detective series, Poirot, Maigret, Miss Marple, Father Brown, Sherlock Holmes, you know that however cunning the villain or convoluted the situation, there is going to emerge a line of logic that leads unerringly to the solution. Once ‘the little grey cells’ get to work, no master criminal can survive for very long.

Human nature in league with evil is capable of very strange manifestations. How can the church, preoccupied with its own credibility and shackled by outworn traditions, possibly act as God’s agent in a world where things have gone so radically wrong? The amazing thing is that Jesus, the unique ambassador of God to a fallen planet, actually requires us to carry on his work. ‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ (John 20:21).

The evidence is in changed lives. Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, Matthew, Saul of Tarsus, Nicodemus – the list extends to the present day, with stories coming in all the time from different nations, age-groups, creedal systems and social backgrounds. Jesus makes all the difference. We can trust him to the end of time.

*Lord, your Spirit gets to the heart of things and people. You have solved even the riddle of death itself. You wrestled with the forces of sin and evil on the cross, and rose triumphant from the grave. Now you ask us to be your agents in a still uncomprehending and perverse world. What can you change for me today?*