

## QUESTIONS

To what extent are you aware of the presence of Christ in your life? Do you feel that he “lives within your heart”?

If we are to talk about “knowing God”, we need to reflect upon the universe that has been created and notice the handiwork of the Creator and see his influence in the moral order: in the way that most of us have a gut feeling about what is right and appropriate behaviour and what actions are ‘evil’.

Winston Churchill is reputed to have claimed:

*‘The evidence that God exists is the existence of Lenin and Trotsky for who a hell is needed.’*

What do you think? Is the way that most sane people are disgusted by atrocities e.g. the Holocaust, help to demonstrate that there is a Creator who has given us a moral sense?

We need to remember that there is a distinction between “knowing about God” and “knowing God Himself” and having a series of correct orthodox beliefs about His attributes and his authority is not the same as being in a personal relationship with our Creator, Redeemer and Lord.

We can experience the presence of God on those special occasions when we are reminded that He is Lord and that we are only too human but we also need to recognise that His love for us is far greater and outweighs all our sinfulness and faults.

Finally there is the sense in which we Christians, as the Body of Christ, are meant to make our Saviour’s presence real.

St Teresa of Avila put it like this:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours,  
yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion  
is to look out to the earth,  
yours are the feet by which He is to go about doing good  
and yours are the hands by which He is to bless us now.

What do you think? How can you help others to know God?

## Knowing God II

At the end of time, billions of people were seated on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly, not cringing with cringing shame - but with belligerence.

"Can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?" snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror ... beatings ... torture ... death!"

In another group a Negro boy lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched, for no crime but being black !"



In another crowd there was a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes: "Why should I suffer?" she murmured. "It wasn't my fault." Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering He had permitted in His world.

How lucky God was to live in Heaven, where all was sweetness and light. Where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a negro, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the vast plain, they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.

Before God could be qualified to be their judge, He must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth as a man.

Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind.

Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured.

At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die so there can be no doubt he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered a word. No one moved.

**For suddenly, all knew that God had already served His sentence.**

The above is a poem entitled “The Long Silence” by Anon. It makes its point by asking us to consider what we think of God.



Jesus himself gave an interesting description of the Last Judgement in one of his parables found in Matthew's gospel: At the end of time when all the nations are brought before him, Jesus will divide them up as a shepherd separates sheep from goats and what will differentiate them will be the ways in which people have looked after him but with both sides claiming ignorance of his presence....

#### READ MATTHEW 25: 31-46

What do you think of these two pictures of the end of time?

Which one speaks to you most effectively?

How are we invited to recognise Jesus according to the parable?

What do they both say about “judgement”? Does Matt 7:1 help?

What do they tell us about the ways in which we think we ‘know’ God and ourselves?



**NOTE** *“Does it make you a better king if you build houses of cedar, finer than those of others? Your father enjoyed a full life. He was always just and fair, and he prospered in everything he did. He gave the poor a fair trial, and all went well with him. That is what it means to know the LORD.” Jer. 22:15-16 GNB*

In what sense can we 'know' God through helping those in need? What does this say about how we 'know' God? How might that work?

The New Testament has an interesting approach to how the world will recognise Jesus today.... Paul speaks frequently about the church as the Body of Christ and the believer as the Temple of the Lord.... in which God dwells through His Spirit and of course the ancient world saw a temple as a place where the divine could be met and encountered so there is a very strong implication that Christians are meant to be the place where non-believers should 'see' Jesus

Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians was dealing with a church that had plenty of problems and when he warned the believers about their sexual behaviour and the immorality for which that city was notorious, he told them quite plainly:

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.

*1Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV*

The implication is that Christians should have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

When Paul wrote to the Church at Colossae, he made sweeping statements about the cosmic influence of Christ and Lordship over all of Creation and then stated in verses 26-7

For ages and ages this message was kept secret from everyone, but now it has been explained to God's people. God did this because he wanted you Gentiles to understand his wonderful and glorious mystery. And the mystery is that Christ lives in you, and he is your hope of sharing in God's glory. [Col 1:26-27 CEV](#)

There are plenty of references in the NT to this awareness that Christians are united together by the Holy Spirit and more than that Christ dwells within them....

As Alfred Henry Ackley so memorably put it:

*You ask me how I know He lives?  
He lives within my heart.*

