

The Knowledge of God I

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This will be the first this morning of a series of four messages on the knowledge of God or religious knowledge. I want to talk about the knowledge of God and the three degrees of knowledge which it is possible for us to have. And I will talk generally this morning about this and give an illustration which I want you to keep in mind for the rest of the four sermons, or three sermons that follow. And then I will talk about the three degrees, the knowledge furnished by reason, the knowledge furnished by faith and the knowledge furnished by the Holy Spirit. Those will be the next three after today.

I want to read a number of Scriptures. John 17:3, you know what that is, this is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. Philippians 3:10, Paul said that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering and be made conformable unto His death. We will simply take the line, that I might know Him. And life is that you might know God, and that I might know Christ.

Then there are some other texts which I want to read. One is in Romans 1:19, 20, Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. Then in Hebrews 11, this passage, now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it, the elders obtained a good report. Through faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God so that things which are seen were not made by things which do appear. Now, it's through faith we understand this. And then 1 Corinthians 2:12,13. Now we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Now, we read in the John quotation, that eternal life is not a thing. Eternal life is a knowledge. This is eternal life that they might know Thee, the only true God. And I hardly need to say to you that when the man of God wrote this word "know" in here, he didn't mean that we should gain the meaning from it, of merely intellectual cognizance. As when I say, I know Hamlet, I read it. I know Mr. Jones; I have been introduced to him. I know the multiplication tables, something that we receive into our minds. John didn't mean that when he said that this is eternal life. Of course, it was Jesus Himself that said it, as if there were any distinction between the words of our Lord and the words of an inspired apostle. But to be accurate, Jesus said in His prayer to His Father, this is

eternal life, that they might know Thee. That knowledge is a deep inner thing. And we want to talk about that over these days ahead, these Sundays before us, that deep inner thing, not the grasp of the mind, not the intellectual cognizance, but something profounder than that. But that is here, that this is eternal life, to know God and know Jesus Christ.

Then Paul's sentence in Philippians, the third, where he sums up his life motto, that I might know Him. Now this is, I think it might be said, I don't like to speak for another man who can't be here to defend himself, but I think I would be safe in saying that those words, that I might know Him, those five words, probably more than any other words, sum up that which made Paul run. That was the motivating power in the life of the man. What an ignoble and base conception of Christianity, to believe that Paul's interest in Jesus Christ was to escape hell. What a tragic and terrible breakdown in our spiritual thinking that we should imagine that Paul's interest in Jesus Christ was that he might sit in the New Jerusalem or that he might pick flowers on the hillsides of glory, as somebody inelegantly called it.

Now, the knowledge of Jesus Christ does deliver us from the results of our own sins, and it does make heaven our future home. But these are byproducts of Christianity and not the center and the core of it. The core of the Christian faith is that I might know God. This is eternal life that I might know God. And this is the destiny and destination, the full future for my life, that I might know Him better. And so the perpetually increasing and everlastingly growing knowledge of God will be our heaven.

Some people might wonder why I don't preach more on heaven. I don't preach very much on heaven. There are several reasons. I don't know very much about heaven as a location. I believe in it as a location, but there's not very much said about it. But there may be other reasons that I don't know of unhidden to me why I don't preach more on heaven. But I believe that heaven will take care of itself, if our relation to God is right. And if our relation to Christ is right, we will need to worry about the matter of heaven or hell. And incidentally, I don't preach very much on hell either. Fortunately, there isn't much known about hell. Only we know it's there, and we know it's the end of a Christless life and the bottom of a Christless grave. And we know heaven is there and is to be entered someday. I wouldn't say the end of the Christian life, but it's to be at least within the framework it's received. It's there. It belongs to us, heaven is ours.

But the main business for you and me in God and in religion now, is not to know all we can about heaven, though you may do that. That's good too, or know all we can about hell. But our main occupation in which we should be constantly engrossed as well as engaged, is that we might know God and His Son Jesus Christ. That we might know God the Father and Jesus Christ to the point of having eternal life, before we even join any church or claim that we're Christians at all, or take upon ourselves the name of Jesus, or call God our Father. And then, not stopping there where a great many Christians do, but going on to make a career out of knowing Jesus Christ better.

Now, this knowledge that I have been talking about, the knowledge of God and divine things, have three degrees. And there are three degrees distinguished. There is the knowledge furnished by reason in the Roman's text, the knowledge furnished by faith in the Hebrew's text, and the knowledge furnished by the Spirit in the Corinthian text. Now, these correspond to a very beautiful illustration, or a very beautiful order in the Old Testament. It is an illustration maybe, rather than a type. You will notice that I don't talk very much about types. I broke a set of teeth on types when I was a young fellow. And I've reacted a bit from types. I believe there are some types in the Bible all right. I don't doubt that at all. I believe that there are certain historic facts, while they are historic facts, nevertheless, have been so placed there, that they mean something else beside what they mean.

Could I illustrate an illustration, if you will forgive me by saying this, that a diamond in a wedding ring, or a wedding ring on the finger is a fact. It is a reality. It's an entity in itself. It is not an imaginative thing nor a poetic thing, it is a reality. You can take it off and hold it and weigh it and measure it and evaluate it and lose it and find it, and it is a reality. It's a testable reality. But to the woman that wears it, it's something more than that. To the woman that wears it, it has a secondary meaning that someone not familiar with the circumstances would not realize at all. It speaks of something beyond itself.

Now, in the Old Testament, there are some historic happenings which speak of something beyond themselves. That does not mean as some of our Neo-orthodox brethren would have us believe that that never happened historically, but that it is a beautiful figure, a story told to illustrate. Now, that did happen, everything in the Bible did happen. It is an historic entity. It is a hard thing that you can check and say, now this happened within a given day or year, under the sun, a certain hour of the day, in a certain historic and national and ethnic setting, this is reality. But by the good grace of God and through the mystery of the Holy Ghost, it may mean something more than that. It may, as the ring does, have another meaning lying beyond it and above it, which the wise will understand, and that doesn't cancel out the historicity of the happening. It did happen, but it's in the will of God it happened that we might see beyond it.

Israel coming out of being in bondage in Egypt for 400 years. Now that was a historic fact. But it's set forth to the church ever since Calvary, it has set forth the fact that man in his bondage is in Egypt, and he's a sinner in Egypt. And when he was delivered by the blood of the Passover, that was a historic fact. But the church of Christ has seen down the centuries that that was more than a historic fact. That was a historic fact with a high symbolic and spiritual meaning. So that to this day, we celebrate the Lord's Supper and it dates back to the Passover and the shedding of the blood and the dying lamb and the sprinkled blood and the deliverance and the distraught people being delivered at night.

Now that's what I mean when I say an illustration that couldn't be a type. I don't believe everything is a type by a long way. And I don't read the Bible with types in mind. But when something sets forth as beautifully and as clearly a truth as this I now shall mention, why, I am not going to be like the man of whom it was said, so much he scorned the throng, that if the crowd by chance went right, he purposely went wrong. I don't want to do it that way.

So, let's look for a little at the Old Testament tabernacle, the Levitical order. In Hebrews 9 & 10 it tells us, that these things were a pattern of the things in the heaven, and that they were a figure of the truth and a shadow of good things to come. God built, and caused to be built into the Old Testament tabernacle and Levitical system, God cause to be built into it, this secondary thing, this heavenly thing, this thing that is divine and eternal. And so affixed its so, that it would illustrate and reveal as by light shining in, a truth that is so heavenly, you couldn't get hold of it if you didn't have an earthly illustration.

Now let's look at that tabernacle. For instance, you could imagine a building without any roof on it, but with sides, with walls, and that building, an enclosure rather than a building, is 150 feet long and 75 feet wide and open to the sky. And there is no door in this enclosure, anywhere around, until you come to the east, and face to East always. And on the east side, there was quite a wide opening, a door, or a gate, a portal. And across that gate, that portal, there was a veil. And then inside, inside of this enclosure, there were three things observable as soon as you went in. One was an altar and the other was a laver. And on that altar, the priests slew the lambs and the heifers. And in that laver, the priests washed themselves.

But now, within that enclosure, there was a smaller enclosure, a smaller building, called rightly, the tabernacle. The other was the outer court. And that tabernacle of course, was much smaller than this enclosure, and it was divided into two parts. And it was entered by a veil. There was a veil that allowed them to enter. The first enclosure you entered and you saw just two things, the laver and the altar, and you saw also this building. But it was shut out by a veil, and you entered through that veil, and then inside there you saw a table upon which was bread for the priests. And you saw seven candlesticks shining light there, because there was no light that could reach it from above. It was completely enclosed. And then of course, there was the table, the candlestick, and the altar of incense, meaning prayer of course. And then, there was another veil there that invited your attention. But nobody dare pass through that veil. That was the veil that shut off the priests from the Holy of Holies, where dwelt only God. And in there, there was only one piece of furniture. And that was the Ark of the Covenant, or the Holy Ark. And in that ark, there was the Law. And over that ark, there was a mercy seat. And above that mercy seat, there were the wings of the cherubim. Between the wings of the cherubim, there was a flaming fire which was the Shekinah.

Now descriptions are always a little bit boresome. And I know you were bored by that, but I think from here on, we'll be all right. That these three divisions correspond to the three kinds of

knowledge, we keep that in the back of our minds while we talk about those three kinds of knowledge for the days ahead. There was the first, the court of the priests, the outer court. And they could worship there. and it was of God, all right, and God owned it. And God didn't reject it. It was God's doings. God put it there. And the sacrifice was made there. And the laver was there. But, it was the light of the sun by day and of the moon, by stars by night that lighted that enclosure. It was by the light of nature. And that corresponds to the first degree of divine knowledge, which is the knowledge that comes by reason.

Religion makes two mistakes. One of them, I think there are three mistakes maybe. One of them is, religion makes reason everything. The other is, that religion makes reason nothing. And the third is, that religion fails to understand what reason is. I think those are three mistakes. Fundamentalism tends to make reason nothing at all. It just isn't anything. And all you have to do is to condemn a man to the seventh hell as to call him a brain, say, that man's a brain. He's a very intellectual man. And immediately the mark of Cain is on his noble, expansive brow, placed there by his brethren.

Brethren, that is a mistake, a great mistake. God Almighty made all the brains you have. And He is not apologizing for them. God isn't going to any devil or any archangel and saying, I'm awfully sorry, I was busy with something else and I made a mistake. I put brains in a human head, and I'm awfully sorry. And if you'll overlook this, I'll try to be more careful. God never apologized to anybody for putting brains in a man's head.

So that's reason. Reason works on nature. Reason works through its senses, through the five senses, and through deductions drawn from the data of the five senses, so that we have this text, the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Now, that's pure reason. That's the light of nature that comes down from above. There isn't anything mysterious about that. It's divine, but it's not mysterious. You know certain things, and we do know certain things. There's a Light that lighteth every man that comes into the world. And everybody knows something about God. And everybody knows something about divine things. Don't think we don't. We do. Everybody knows it. The heathen, the Danies in the Baliem Valley, know a little bit about God. They think they came up from the river and never were created. And at least they've gone that far. They know a little.

Everybody can know a little. We see the sun by day and the moon by night. We see the stars that twinkle in their far distance there. And we hear the roar of the wind, and we see the lightning strike the oak. And we see the mother kitten curl down and nestle up against her kittens. And we see the wonder and the beauty of nature all around about us. We know each other. And so we learn something. And we learn something of the God who made it all, as I learned something of Shakespeare from reading his play, or of Milton from reading Paradise Lost. I don't see him but I learned something about him. Reason tells me something about the author when I see the book.

Reason tells me something of the artist when I see the painting. So, when I look around on God's world, I know something about God. That's the light of nature. That's reason. And you can know something about God through nature and through reason. Let's not throw that out.

Back in earlier in more restful days, they talked about what they called natural theology, but you don't hear anybody talking about natural theology anymore. Because if you do, they will think you're a modernist. But I am not a modernist, nor am I a liberal. I am not now, neither have been a liberal. And I don't have to hide behind any Fifth Amendment. I am frank to say that I am an evangelical, in that I believe all of the Bible, and I have only a friendly smile, and not too friendly a smile, for those who try to explain parts of it away. I know better. I know it's all God's word and it's here. But I also know that God has given us His word and the things that are seen, the visible world tells us something about God's eternal power and Godhead. We know at least one thing, that the God that made the world is a powerful God. We know that much.

And we know another thing about that God, He was free to make it. So, we know He is sovereign. And we know that it took a mighty wise mind to put this world of ours together. So, we know God has wisdom. We know God has knowledge. So, we can know quite a little bit about God by just looking around about you. Go on out. Come out our way and listen to the 17-year locusts. You will learn a little bit about God in a practical, salty, down to earth way, not in that dreamy, poetic way, that we hear about some times, but in a salty, down-to-earth way. You will know a good deal about God. Look up among the leaves and see the wonder of it all. On the one little branch, there'd be as many as 12 to 15 locusts.

And you say, I'm going to pick one off, and you pick him off and he's not a locust at all. He just where the locust used to be. He's been called out of it. And there, I don't understand all that. Only I know that that didn't happen like that brother. It just didn't happen like that. There was a God who not only knows in a great broad, on a broad scale, but He knows all the details and He fixed it so every seven-year locust, 17-year locust will do exactly what he ought to do. And he fixed him so he didn't even sing like the other locusts. You notice he's got a different song if that is a song, whatever it is, he's gotten different, it sounds different from the other locusts. God made him.

We talk about the integration and the difference of the races and we all ought to be one lovely brown crowd all mixed together in another generation or two. Have you ever stopped to think brothers and sisters that God made 125 species of warbler alone and put them on the North American continent. One hundred and twenty-five that can be identified, and not any two of them are alike. And they stay within their own bracket and breed within their own bracket and never fight and never fuss and never have racial difficulties. But they say, 125 different kinds of warbler, just warblers, to say nothing else of the other birds. And then they want me to believe that God wants the whole human race to be reduced to one brown human muddy looking and with no racial

characteristics whatsoever. If he does, he went about it in a funny way. And it doesn't seem to jive with everything else I can learn about God.

Well, now, that's the outer court, the tabernacle, the knowledge by reason. You can draw your conclusions from reason. But you can't get saved that way and you can't get to heaven that way and you can't get rid of your sins that way. You can't know God that way to the point where you will be delivered and have eternal life, but you can still have a lot of knowledge about God. And the beautiful thing about it is, when you become a Christian and do come to know God indeed, you don't have to murder this other part of your life. You can love it too.

We just sang a number here by Reginald Heber, The Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning. Well, Reginald Heber was a great soul, a bishop, a missionary to India and a great soul wrote, Holy, Holy, Holy and many other of the great songs. O Hosanna, Hosanna to the Living Lord, one of the most ecstatically spiritual songs ever written. And yet this man loved nature to a point where his hymns were all interwoven with the glories of nature. Take David, the man of God of whom Jesus said, God spake by the mouth of David, spake by the Holy Ghost. The mouths of David and the Holy Ghost were used interchangeably. The Holy Ghost speaking through the mouth of David. And yet you can read the Psalms of David and literally be lifted inside of you with the wonder and the glory of what David saw everywhere.

Well, now that's, that's one, that's the outer tabernacle. And you leave that and you go through a veil and you come into the holy place. And there you have a candlestick and the bread and the altar of incense, but there's no light from sun or stars. Reason comes in and kneels there. Reason says, thank you God, for there's no roof on the outer court. And reason can look up and see the sun by day and the stars by night. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for what I see. Thank you for what I hear. Thank you for what my tongue can taste and my nose can smell and my fingers can feel. Thank Thee Heavenly Father for the outer court. Thank Thee for reason and thank Thee for deduction and logic and conclusions. Thank Thee Father for all that I've learned about Thee out in the outer court.

But reason kneels and worships inside because there's no light of nature that can come there. There's simply candlesticks and bread and an altar of incense, that is all. That is getting a little bit closer, because that is the knowledge furnished by faith. There, reason can't check. Reason listens to the voice of God and looks at the symbolism there before him and believes. And so in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we learn that we have to believe certain things and accept them by faith. So that faith is another manner of receiving information from God and knowing and having knowledge of divine and spiritual things. The knowledge of faith is a legitimate and proper way of finding out things. You'll never be able to get at them with your reason. You will have to believe and that is equivalent to faith, to know Him, because by faith, we know. By faith we know.

And then there's the third, there's another veil. The priests enter every so often into that holy place. But nobody enters into the Holy of Holies, because it's shut off from the holy place. There there's only one piece of furniture, the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat, and the cherubim and the shekinah, the flame of fire from which God speaks. Once a year, the high priest goes in there. Some said he took a sensor with him and that's why it is mentioned in Hebrews 9, he went in there with blood of atonement and with great reverence. No light shone from moon or stars for no light was needed. He carried no light of his own because no human reconstructed light, not even a candlestick was needed. But the light in that holy place, that Holy of Holies came from between the wings of the cherubim. There was the Shekinah, the Presence, the Presence shining out there and filling all the room with a soft, deep glow.

And the high priest looked down and crept forward in a rapture of delight and sprinkled the blood there and then backed away in deep reverence, and Israel had been atoned for another year. And Israel's sins could be forgiven now for the high priest confessed there in that awful moment, the sins of Israel. And then, he backed out. And several priests came and helped for it was so heavy, it took seven priests they said, to shut that veil back up again. That beautiful veil so carefully woven by men who had to be filled with the Holy Ghost in order to know how to sew beautiful enough to make that veil. And for another year until the next day of atonement, nobody entered in there. There was God's presence. There with gold, there was the shining light. There was the mercy seat. When Jesus our Lord died on a cross, that veil that took seven men to move, was ripped from the top to the bottom. And now the book of Hebrews says, we can enter ourselves where the high priest is. Every one of us can enter into that place. There is the knowledge that comes by spiritual experience.

There are three degrees of knowledge, my friends, there's the knowledge that God gives us through nature, reason. There is the knowledge He gives us by faith. He tells us certain things, we accept them. That's knowledge. But that's not enough. To that knowledge, we enter on in a little further yet and that is into the very Presence where we can hardly speak, and we're alone with God there, we're touched and reverent and hushed with devotion. There is knowledge by spiritual experience.

Now what is the difference between the kind of teaching that I try to give and that many others also, some others try to give an ordinary orthodoxy, ordinary fundamentalism. Ordinary fundamentalism passes by reason and will hardly believe in it at all. It goes on into the holy place and accepts everything by faith, and that's good. The first is not good. The second is, but never goes on into the Holy of Holies where they're silent with breathless devotion. There we call the deeper life. Nothing, nothing of pride can enter there. Nothing human can enter there except the redeemed human spirit. And there, kneeling in awestruck devotion, the soul waits on God, and sees God and feels God and senses God, and knows with the knowledge that comes by the Spirit. The Holy Ghost reveals and we know nothing contrary to faith, nothing contrary to divine

revelation, but only and not even anything beyond it, but only that we have in reality what otherwise we would only know to be true by faith.

Now the inner core is ours. The inner life is ours. That inner life bears the same relation to faith, as the spirit of a man bears to the man's body. The man's spirit fits his body, I suppose it does. It's not contrary to it. Both are of God, but the body without the spirit is a corpse. So the knowledge that comes by faith, theology doctrine, without the Holy Ghost is a corpse too. And that's what's happened to us in the last years. We have rejected reason. We haven't harmed ourselves too badly there I suppose.

But I like to go out sometimes and stand between the altar and the laver and know the Lamb dies from a sin on the altar, and on the laver, I can wash the sin away. I can stand between the altar and the laver and look up toward heaven and thank God for the stars that shine. But I don't stop there. Emerson stopped there. He didn't even go that far. Whittie I think stopped there too, and lots of others. Oliver Wendell Holmes stopped there. That's the reason I don't like his hymns. A lot of men stop in the outer court and they never went on. The Christian goes on and receives by faith everything that God has to say to Him. By faith he believes it. He can't understand it. Reason is outside looking up at the stars, but faith is inside looking up for God. But he doesn't stop there if he's a real Christian. Paul said, that I might know Him I press on, I press on. Was he thinking about pressing on past the outer court, past the Holy Place, past the holy, into the Holy of Holies? Was he by any means, that I might know Him?

So, that increasing knowledge of God, that progressive knowledge of God, that is the career of the Christian. That he might know God and know divine things and heavenly things with increasing awareness, with increasing intensity of consciousness. With increasing breadth and depth and width and height, on and on, until he sees Him as He is.

Now for the next weeks. I'm going to talk about the knowledge of reason. How valid is it and how far can it take us. I am going to talk about the knowledge of faith. Where does it enter? And, I'm going to talk about what is the knowledge of experience. And if you miss the others, don't miss the last one. The glory of the immediate knowledge of the Presence.