

The Knowledge of God III

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

July 8, 1956

The Daily News will have a man here next Sunday morning, to look us over and write us up. They were already here and took some pictures. So, you'd better come dressed tomorrow, next Sunday I mean, in the morning, for the occasion. The brother will be here and they usually are pretty frank about what they say.

Now, these mornings, I have been talking about three degrees of Christian knowledge. This is the third message on the subject and there will be one more next Sunday morning. And I pointed out that there are three degrees of knowledge possible, corresponding to the three divisions of the tabernacle. The first being that of reason. 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 that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.

And then, faith, corresponding to the holy place. Through faith, we understand, Hebrews 11. And then corresponding to the Holy of Holies, the knowledge that comes by the revelation of the Spirit. 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 teaches. Comparing spiritual things with spiritual, for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they're spiritually discerned.

Now, there we have it, that there are three degrees of knowledge, reason, the outer court, the light of nature; faith, the holy place; and the Holy Ghost, the Holy of Holies. And about the first I talked last week about that kind of knowledge which comes to us by reason, working on data, furnished by the senses: observation, research, experiment, discovery, or just ordinary, practical, common sense, looking around us.

Now, there is a knowledge more excellent than the knowledge gained by reason; and knowledge further in and nearer to God, and it is the knowledge offered to faith. And that is what I want to talk about today. Next Sunday morning, I want to speak about that spiritual knowledge, that knowledge which is intuitive, which comes by a flash of the light of the Holy Spirit in the human breast.

But now, I point out to you that revealed truth is addressed to faith only. And when I say revealed truth, I mean the Scriptures. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And they gave us revealed truth, which we find in the Old Testament and the New. And it is revealed to faith only. There was an old man of God by the name of Anselm, they call him St. Anselm now, who lived way back in the early days. He was known as one of the church fathers and is a great theologian. And he taught that in religion, faith plays the part played by experience in the things of the world. What experience will teach you of earthly things, faith will teach you of heavenly things.

Now in experience, we know as a result of data furnished us by our famous five senses, by the things of sight and sound and taste and touch and smell. And then we make deductions from these, and we piece them out, and we put them together and we draw conclusions. And we build up philosophies and sciences and common knowledge, farmer knowledge, the knowledge of the farmer sitting on the fence chewing the straw. Or the knowledge of the scientist in the laboratory, the knowledge of the philosopher in the library. All of it is only knowledge which has been gained through the five senses and then taken and compounded and made into other knowledge, which we drew from that knowledge. And that sound badly confused, but it's not so badly confused as we go along.

Now, for that kind of knowledge, no faith is necessary, absolutely none at all. Let us reduce it to its simplest form. A little boy feels in his pocket and feels that he has marbles there. And it suddenly strikes him, he wants to know how many. So he takes them out into the palm of his hand and laboriously counts them, and finds he has nine. Now, he has counted his marbles, and he knows he has nine. Now it doesn't take any faith, and it isn't guesswork. It's just knowledge gained by observation. He has counted them. And he knows how many he has.

Or a jeweler will test to see whether that metal before him is gold or not. Or, whether that thing he holds in his hand is glass or diamond. He has certain tests which he puts them to. And when they have met those tests or failed to meet them, he knows exactly what he has in his hand, whether gold or something else, whether diamond or glass. And it doesn't take any faith. It doesn't call upon faith at all. He knows. He's found out by reason. He's tested it. Experience has taught him and he doesn't have to believe anything or take anybody's word for anything. It isn't a question of character or promise, it's a question of finding out for himself.

That is the knowledge which reason has, or the naturalist observes the habits of, say, the ringneck pheasant. And after he has spent half a lifetime, and some of them actually have, observing this or that bird, and writing their observations in a book, he doesn't have to have faith, he knows. He's watched them until he knows how they act. He knows all about them. Or the chemist analyzing some sort of liquid to determine what it is. Finally, after putting it to careful tests, will be able to write down on a piece of paper, the formula he knows what he has there.

Now that doesn't take faith. The simple fact is the data that reason furnishes is not addressed to faith at all. The scientist doesn't have to have any faith unless you want to actually stretch it thin and say that he has to have faith that everything will remain as it is. Well, if you call that faith, then that's faith. But that isn't what I mean when I say faith. I mean something else as I shall point out.

Now we are discovering more and more facts about nature. And to do so men have worked out more and more, and finer and finer techniques. And we're getting to know more and more about everything. And faith is not called upon. A man who spends his lifetime examining and counting and weighing and measuring and analyzing. That man doesn't have to have faith. He finds out. He could put it down. He knows. He tests it. What a man has, why does he have hope for it. And what he knows by observation, why does he have to have any faith? Why is he trusting in anybody's character, yet he doesn't. He doesn't have to.

But now my brethren, there is a body of knowledge, and that body of knowledge is too high for the human mind to reach. There is no technique by which it can be gotten at. It is super sensible in that it cannot be reached by any of the senses. Simply stated, it cannot be smelled nor tasted nor touched nor heard nor felt. And why, because we cannot through our senses get any data about it naturally. There is nothing that we can do with it. It's just out there. It's beyond us. Otherwise, God would not have had to send holy men and say to them, thus saith the Lord. There would have had to be no divine revelation. There is that revelation to reason. It is the heavens which declare the glory of God and the firmament which showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. It is the sun and the moon and the stars and all nature, they are addressed to reason. And so that is a revelation addressed to reason.

But the revelation addressed to faith is way above that and far beyond it and deeper down and further out and beyond so that reason cannot get to it. And that is the body of knowledge which we have no technique to discover, and which is addressed to faith alone. You either believe it or else you don't. And there's no way of proving it. Although men have labored lifetimes to try to prove it. But it is known to faith, and it receives its data, not by examination or research or observation, but by a direct statement of God Almighty. It is a revelation handed down and given. It is a statement made, or a series of statements made.

Now what are these data? What are these truths? I can't hope to name all of them in one sermon. It would take two weeks to do it. But I can only, I shall name twelve if I get that far, just as samples and the major truths, but certainly not all of them. For instance, there's the Trinity of the Godhead. Now, after we have had it revealed to us that God is a Trinity, then reason can go to work on that revelation, and can try to show that we knew it all the time. And there are philosophers and theologians who do that very thing. They try to show that the Trinity is revealed everywhere in nature. But until God Almighty revealed it in the Bible, nobody dreamed of it, which ought to be

proof enough that it's not revealed in nature. Nature revealed certain truths to reason, but the Trinity is not one of them. The Trinity is revealed to faith.

And it's only by faith that we know there's a Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. It's only by faith that we're Trinitarians and not Unitarians. It is only that we believe what God has said, that we can sing, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so that you either believe or you don't. And you have no way of confirming it. We sometimes try to illustrate it so to understand it and break it down a little bit. And we show how water might consist of mist and rain and ice. And we show how man has his three dimensions. And we try to explain it, but we had to have it handed to us, ready made by divine revelation, or we never could have arisen to know it.

And then that man is made in the image of God. How could we know that? This is one of the sweetest doctrines in the Bible that God made man in His own image, in the image of God and likeness of God made he him. And I believe this with all my heart, but who would ever have thought of that? Who could have smelled that out, or thought it out or heard it or felt it or sensed or tasted it? How could it have yielded to the instrument of the scientist or to the prying mind of the philosopher? No, we had to be told that man was made in the image of God.

The Greek philosopher said that man showed that he was born to think and to practice virtue. And therefore, back of it all, there must have been a God who thinks and who is virtuous, but that's about as close as reason ever got to it. That man was made in the image of God is a truth completely hidden to reason but gloriously revealed to faith.

And then there's the fall of man. Now, how did we get here? Revelation tells us that we got here by creation of God as men, and then that we fell. Now, that's the way God says it happened. And when we deny faith or have no faith, then we try to reason it out.

Some years ago, I read a book. What was this man's name? He was a famous scientist. For the moment. I can't recall. He's gone now, but he was quite popular 20-25 years ago. {William J. Fielding} And he called it, The Caveman Within Us. And he denied divine revelation, but he began with reason. And he said, man, is two kinds of being. Now, I'm paraphrasing what he said certainly, but giving the gist of it. He said, Man is good and bad. He has in him so much of good, but he also is capable of being so terribly bad.

Now, he said, here's the reason. We have come up from the beast by evolution. And we are slowly purging out the beast out of us, but we haven't gotten rid of it yet. And the good in us is that toward which we're developing, but the bad in this is the caveman, the beast, the animal that's still there. And he said, now all of this growling and snarling and lying and violence and impurity and gluttony and drinking, he says, this is the result of the caveman. The old beast that hasn't yet been

purged out of us. But the love and kindness and mercy and patience and peace, that's the good thing toward which we're moving.

Now, isn't it strange that he said the same thing that Paul said, only he said it upside down. Paul said that we were originally made in the image and likeness of God. Genesis says it and Paul accepts it, but that we failed because of one man's sin. And that caveman within us is the fallen man inside of us. Not the man that crawled up but the man that fell down. But observation shows the same thing, that man is both good and bad. That he's capable of love and kindness and self-sacrifice, or a nasty ill-tempered abuse and swearing and gluttony.

So, reason tries to explain it and comes up with a caveman. But revelation doesn't explain it. Revelation sets it forth as a shining light and says, man sinned. And the day he sinned, he died spiritually, and that's what's wrong with him. And so, death came upon all men. And that caveman within us is no caveman at all. It's simply the old fallen man. You've got to take your choice now my brethren, either try to reason it out or accept it by faith. I accept as a datum of knowledge that man is a fallen creature.

And then again, the doctrine that God so loved the world. How are you going to figure that out? Is it obvious to us? Is it obvious to reason that God so loves the world when the lightning will flash down and kill fifteen children picnicking? Is it obvious to us that God so loved the world, when the great ocean will swallow a ship with 900 people on it? Is it obvious to us that God so loved the world when the desert will swallow up a band of foolish travelers and let them die and be eaten by buzzards on the hot surface of the sandy desert?

Is it obvious that God so loved the world when that sweet woman, beautiful to look at, suddenly twisted out of shape with polio or cancer? No, reason doesn't tell us that God so loved the world. Reason tells us that the God who made the world cares for it after a fashion. Reason goes that far. But reason never said, God so loved the world. That was a revelation from God, my brethren. You and I have heard this until it's old stuff to us. And we imagine that everybody ought to know it.

You know, there are people, our good friend Ed may be in Baliem Valley today. He was in Hollandia yesterday, arrived there. And if he's gotten into the Baliem Valley today, or as soon as he gets in, he will be trying to tell those people that God so loved the world. And at first, they won't believe it, for they haven't believed it. But when it slowly dawns on them that the God that made the world loves them, then we may be making some converts there among the Danis. But that will be wonderful news to them. To Ed, it's just old stuff that he heard when he was a little kid. Little toothless Ed learned that when he was in Sunday school.

And so, it's common to him and to you and me. But oh, what a revelation to those that never heard it before. God loves mankind. God loves the world. And in spite of the lightning and the sandy desert and the ocean and the wind and the flood, God loved mankind to give His Son.

That's revelation, brethren. And that is a datum of knowledge which is given to our faith, not to our reason. Hymnology has been wondering about it ever since it was first revealed. How can it be? Oh, how can it be the hymns all cry? Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound? Oh, depths of mercy, can it be, God left that gated ajar for me? Brother McAfee and I have amused ourselves a bit in a spiritual way by looking at the old Methodist hymnal and finding out how many hymns start out, oh, and an. And can it be, and oh, the love of God. Why that's revelation, my brethren. Reason never could get to it. You can't smell that truth. No scientist can get that into his test tube. That's a revelation from God to faith.

And then, that Christ was virgin born. I shudder deep in my heart when men talk about parthenogenesis and try to show how there are certain circuits possible in certain low levels of nature, to bring about offspring from a mother only as it is. Oh, my brethren, this is not something to be reasoned about. This is a burning bush to be knelt before. We get down on our knees and say, I believe in God the Father Almighty and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord was born of the Virgin Mary. And we kneel there with our faces hidden and cry, holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. But only the man who doesn't understand, tries to understand. Only the man of unreason tries to reason in that holy place. There are times when reason is an affront to God Almighty. There are times when the brazen mind enters the sanctuary and tries to understand that which is ineffable and inscrutable. And when it enters there, it's an insult to God.

So, the man who tries to explain the virgin birth, is insulting God Almighty. There's only one thing to do before that miracle and marvel and mystery, and that is to cry, my Lord and my God, Thou knowest. And that Jesus Christ's blood which was shed on the cross, saves men from sin. There is a revelation to faith, and we never should try to explain it. When men get up to preach about the chemistry of the blood, I want to grab my hat and get out of there so fast. Trying to explain how the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse a man from sin. I sat one time and shuddered while a man preached on the chemistry of the blood.

Another man had written a book on the chemistry of the blood. One man is dead and the other still alive. And I wouldn't hesitate to say bluntly that I don't believe that any man ought to try to take it on himself to explain by natural processes, how the blood of Jesus Christ can atone for human sin. Never, never my brethren! The moment I can understand it, I can say I will arise and be like the Most High. I will exalt my throne equal to the throne of God. The devil tempted mankind when he said, thou shalt be as gods knowing. And the desire to know what was never intended to be understood, and to explain what can only be known by faith, has crushed the church from Augustine to the present hour.

So, how the blood of Jesus cleanses me, I do not know, but oh, I believe it. I believe it. In that hour, which may come to me as it may come to you, when everybody knows, and we know that we've only a little time. And tomorrow won't matter because tomorrow we'll be with God. On the eve of our coronation, we won't say, get down that book and read the chapter about corpuscles. Get me down that book and read about the serum in which the white and the red corpuscles float. I want to have a little more assurance before I die. Oh no, no brethren, we look away from all man's puny bird brain. And we look away to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. And we'll say the blood of His Son cleanses us from all sin. Thank God, I know it, I know it.

The old dying bishop, they said to him, Bishop, what have you to say? And he said, I have only this to say, that now that I'm about to go, my theology has been reduced to one text. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That's it, my brethren.

And that Christ rose the third day. I wonder why the children of God won't let this alone, trying to prove the possibility of the resurrection. Trying to show how men can be raised from the dead, can never be. We possess no technique to prove that Christ rose from the dead. And even if scientists could get to a point where they could restore human life after death, there will never be, but granted for a moment, it might be. Still, it would be no proof that a man, 2,000 years ago, rose from the dead the third day. That's not a doctrine to be defended, that's a doctrine to be proclaimed. And the Spirit of God never witnesses to defense. He witnesses to proclamation. The gospel evangel is the gospel of assertion and proclamation, never, never is a defense or apology.

So, it is told to us by the great God Almighty, that this Jesus Christ who walked in Galilee was virgin-born and that He was God and that He died for our sins and His blood cleanses from sin. That He rose from the dead the third day, and that He now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. There isn't any way to prove that. Not all the illustrations, not all the science films, you can quote that if you want to. They know what I think of their science films, my good friends down at 108th, whatever it is. Not all your scientific films will ever prove anything except to reason. It'll help you to have a little more knowledge out in the outer court, out in the light of nature, out where Mohamedans can be and Roman Catholics and all the rest. Out there where there is no Holy Ghost and no faith. For no proof ever helps anybody's faith from the beginning of the world. Never.

And if tomorrow morning, if God should take me aside and surround me by the angels, and prove to my intellect that Christ had been risen from the dead, it couldn't confirm my faith at all. I already believe it with everything inside of me. God said it and I believe it. It's a datum of knowledge given to faith. And faith grasps it and says, amen.

Back to Anselm again, in religion, faith takes the place that experience takes in nature. Just as a scientist can measure a star and know exactly how large it is and how fast it's moving--and that's

by experience--so I know that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and that's my faith. I know my sins are gone. That's a revelation of God to my heart, revelation of God to my faith. I know that, but I can't prove it. It may be that it's only gone underground. Reason would say, oh I know what's happened to you. You got yourself all worked up and you had a psychological explosion and your sins went underground, and your sense of self-accusation and sin-consciousness just went underground. It's still there in your subconscious. Not. That isn't where it is Brother. I will bury your sins in the sea of My forgetfulness and will remember them no more against thee forever. That's where they are. They have not gone underground, they've gone under sea, the sea of God's forgetfulness. I believe that, and I can die with that. I can live with that. And I can face eternity with that.

A man's resurrection from the dead. Go to almost any library and you can run onto a lot of books which aim to prove that there's a life beyond this life. Some dear old widow, God bless her, she goes to Madame Zelia and they go through certain crossing of the palm with a nice bill and then a few eerie shrugs and the light goes out and Papa speaks from the other world. And it's funny how dumb Papa always sounds. Everybody that dies gets so dumb, they always say the same thing. Do not worry. I am at peace. All is well. Then there's a click, and the circuit is cut off. And they don't hear from Papa, but she worries and goes back and pay some more, and he says the same dumb thing again. Nobody ever yet returns to say it's hot here. Nobody ever yet said I saw Jesus. They always say, all is well. I'm at peace. Do not worry. It's like flying to Florida and sending a telegram back to your worrying wife saying, we made it. Don't worry.

Well now brethren, if you want to place your hope of immortality on that kind of silly business, you may. But I have something better than that. Listen, what I read about here. Listen, for our friend Paul, God bless him, he was just about to go. He'd finished his course, and here's what he said. Jesus Christ was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began but is now was made manifest by the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. That's it. Then rest my long-divided heart, fixed on this blissful center rest and don't bother Madame Zelia. She doesn't know anything about it either. And when she comes to die, she'll howl like a banshee and all her supposed knowledge will fail.

Man's resurrection and Christ's triumph and all of eschatology, all that lies out there. And that big ugly word eschatology, which mean future events. All of that I take by faith. I believe it will be. I believe that righteousness will triumph, that God Almighty will have his way. The sovereign purposes of God will be fulfilled. That Jesus Christ will sit and the earth will be His footstool and heaven will be His throne. And that the Jew will be back in Palestine. The church will be sitting as a bride of the Lamb. And the nations of the earth will be walking in peace and every man shall sit under his own vine and pick trees and none will make afraid for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. I believe it. Do you? That's a revelation to faith. Reason can't enter there. There's the candlesticks, burning brightly. That's revelation. It's not God,

it's revelation of God. And there's the incense table that sends up spiral prayer. And there's the shewbread which is the Lord's Supper. That's in that holy place. No night light of reason enters there, it is faith.

And so, Faith is an organ of knowledge. Remember, reason is an organ of knowledge. Faith is an organ of knowledge, and the Holy Spirit. It is hard to say an organ of knowledge, but the human spirit is an organ of knowledge that to which the Holy Spirit can impart what He wants us to know. Now, these are facts that are known. And all the efforts to harmonize science and the gospel message is a tacit proof that the attempted harmonizers are not believers at all. They're reasoners. They are rationalists.

And there's a school of thought which has sprung up in the last fifteen years in America, and they're busy proving it that Christianity is scientifically sound and philosophically correct. I believe it's all that, but we can't prove that it is. And the moment we start proving it is, faith lies down and dies. God doesn't have to prove to me that He's true. He doesn't have to. He tells me. I believe it. If a man trusts his wife, he doesn't have a detective running around after her proving anything. He trusts her. I trust God Almighty. I don't have to have the detective reason nosing around to see whether God is telling the truth or not. I know He's telling the truth.

There is further-in knowledge, and we'll talk about that next Sunday. I hope you can be back. It is the knowledge beyond faith. It is the direct knowledge which through faith, the Holy Spirit imparts to the human spirit. And I don't think you've ever heard a sermon on that, probably in fundamental circles in your life, and yet it is the common belief of the church fathers and is written into our hymns and our books of devotion. So, I hope you can be back next week.