

# The Knowledge of God IV

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Now this will be the last of four sermons on three degrees of divine knowledge. And I have used the same text for all of them. And just briefly to refresh your memory, I said that there were three degrees of divine knowledge corresponding to the three divisions of the tabernacle in the Old Testament ritual: the outer court, which corresponds to reason. And the text I read was Romans 1:19 and 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.

Then there is a second degree of knowledge, superior to the first, and that is, the knowledge that comes to faith. And I took for a text, though there are very many I might have chosen, Hebrews 11:3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God. And then, there is another degree of Christian knowledge which is the knowledge the Spirit imparts. And that corresponds to the Holy of Holies in the temple. And I read the Scripture, 1 Corinthians 1:9-14. I won't read it all now, but only read this part. 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. But 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 on three previous talks I have treated it like this. I've talked first about the knowledge of God. Then in my second sermon, two weeks ago, I spoke about what the old writers called natural theology, the knowledge that we may gain about God and heavenly things from nature itself; reason working on data furnished by reason. Then last Sunday morning, I talked about revealed theology, the knowledge received by faith through divine inspiration. Now today, I must talk about a knowledge that's still more excellent, and that is the knowledge which Paul says, the Spirit reveals to our spirits. And this is so excellent that it belongs to heaven rather than earth. And is only given here as a little earnest of what will come.

Now, there are some things that God gives us that He just gives all of it to us, and there isn't anything that He doesn't give. But there are other things that he gives only in veiled measure and degree. And to this knowledge which is the more excellent knowledge, it is a heavenly knowledge and will be perfected and completed in heaven. And it belongs in heaven and is of heaven, but it is given here in small measure. And of course, the degree that we receive of it depends upon our response and our meeting the condition.

Now, it is so excellent this knowledge, this further-in knowledge revealed by the Spirit, that nothing more excellent awaits us in heaven than this knowledge, except that there it will be given in perfection, and here we have it only up to our imperfect capacity. There we will be enlarged and perfected to receive in full degree this knowledge of God. And John says, we shall be like Him and shall know Him. And the Revelator says that we shall look on His face and His name shall be on our forehead.

Now, this knowledge, this more excellent knowledge which I speak this morning, does not contradict the other two. Nothing ever contradicts anything else in the kingdom of God if we could only know it. It is only that we think it contradicts. Nothing in God ever contradicts anything else in God. There are no contradictions in God, so that when I say there are three degrees of knowledge, the knowledge given to reason, the knowledge given to the faith and the knowledge revealed by the Spirit, I do not mean that one contradicts the other, for they do not contradict each other and neither does one make the other unnecessary.

This last degree of knowledge of which I speak, the knowledge that flashed across the human heart by an afflatus of the Holy Spirit does not make the knowledge of reason unnecessary, for we are reasonable creatures. We're logical beings though we don't always live like it. And therefore, we cannot cancel out our reason. I do not believe that anything that comes by the Spirit will contradict reason, because reason is an attribute of God. And God can't contradict Himself. Therefore, anything God reveals to us in our deep heart is bound to be according to reason, though it may go way beyond reason. And neither does it contradict faith. Now, there is nothing that the Spirit of God will reveal to the inner life of a man that will contradict faith. It will be according to faith and not contrary to faith. But it sets a crown upon reason and faith and leads them on to their perfection, but it does not contradict them, cancel them out, or make them unnecessary.

Now, what kind of knowledge is this? Well, this knowledge is by direct spiritual experience. You see, Paul very clearly mentions this here. He says, It is written in the Old Testament that eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. And thus, these things are divinely revealed by inward spiritual experience. An impartation of divine knowledge by a direct afflatus of the Spirit of God.

And this is what you don't hear much about these days though it's the common teaching of the New Testament, and it was the common teaching of the church fathers. And it is not heresy of any degree or kind. It is not a cult or a teaching of any cult, but the common traditional teaching of the fathers and the reformers and the martyrs and the mystics and the revivalists and the church leaders and the hymnists, all down the years. And I can take you to any hymnbook, be it Presbyterian or Methodist or Baptist or Moravian or Episcopalian or whatever, and I can show you everything that I'm saying this morning. We sing them, but we don't believe them. Or, if we try to believe them, we don't understand them. And so we sing truths which are scriptural truths, traditional truths, truths which have been believed by the fathers and written into the great books of devotion. We sing them and don't know what we're singing about, because we are so languorous and take things so for granted. But this impartation of spiritual knowledge by a direct afflatus of the Holy Ghost, is not contrary to reason I say, but it is immediate knowledge, not mediated knowledge.

Now, those are philosophical terms and I'm going to break them down for the young people. You older people know what I mean. But you know the difference between mediated and immediate, a thing that is immediate and the thing that's mediated, that is direct or indirect.

Now, there is a knowledge of reason which is mediated to us. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. What mediates that knowledge to us? Two things, the heavens and the firmament and our reason, so that we know the heaven and the earth and the firmament, mediated to us by the firmament and by reason. So that the knowledge we get of the heaven and the earth, all of natural theology, all that comes by reason and the human intellect is a mediated knowledge. It is not immediate, it is mediated. It comes to us more or less by gadgets and by means of faculties and organs.

Then, the knowledge that we receive by revelation is mediated to us through faith. The resurrection, for instance, who here knows anything about the resurrection? You know absolutely nothing by immediate experience of the resurrection. There was only one or two men that ever lived, that knew anything about the resurrection by immediate experience, and that would be Lazarus maybe, and the widow's son maybe, and the little girl. They were raised from the dead, so they'd had an immediate experience of resurrection. But all you and I know about resurrection is what the Bible tells us, and that's mediated to us through faith.

Did you ever sit down and try to visualize the resurrection? What would happen to you when you rose again from the dead? It's an impossible task. You can't do it, because you have not had immediate experience. But there will be a time when you can do it. You can tell the archangel Gabriel all about it, he won't know anything about it except by faith. Gabriel never died to rise again. So that he only knows by faith about the resurrection, Christ knows by immediate experience, because He rose from the dead. You and I know by faith. It's mediated to us by faith. And so our poor minds stagger along under the burden of a gorgeous and glorious truth too much for us. And we say, I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and so we do. And we stand at the graveside and look down as our loved ones are being lowered into their quiet sleep and we say to ourselves, I believe I'll see him again. I shall see her again. We say I know that my Redeemer liveth and I shall see Him in that day. But that is a knowledge given to us by faith and mediated to us through faith.

And now let's look at another kind of knowledge. How do you know you're alive? No, I'm not trying to be humorous. I'm serious. How do you know you're alive? That is an immediate knowledge. Reason hasn't anything to do with it and neither has faith. You know you're alive, and maybe some of you never thought about that. Have you ever thought about it? Sit down sometime turn the radio and the television off and fold the newspaper, and all of them, all the newspapers, fold them all up. Put Time Magazine under the desk and see whether you can't think a little about this. How do you know you're alive? Well, you know because your mother told you. Some of you never saw your mother. Maybe she died when you were born. Do you know because you read it in a book? How foolish to go to the library and get a book to discover and learn that you are alive. The knowledge that we are alive is not mediated to us through reason or faith. It is an intuition that is immediate and direct.

Then, how do you know you are yourself and not somebody else? Now, am I being silly? Not the slightest, my brethren. How do you know you are yourself and not somebody else? You know it by immediate intuition. If there were some friends of yours, were to pull a little hoax on you and in your asleep were to carefully transport you to somebody else's bedroom, take all of your clothes and all, everything that belongs to you away and put you there and then put another man's identification card in your wallet and in every way possible try to make you out to be somebody else. You'd wake up and you'd be confused and

irritated, but you wouldn't in anywise believe you were the other man. Because nobody can prove you're another man and nobody can disprove who you are, because you have it without mediation, by argument or reason or faith or knowledge. You have it by direct awareness.

Now, that's exactly what I mean by this higher degree of knowledge. This knowledge which is not by reason, and while it is by faith, it is the perfection and crown of faith in that it comes by direct knowledge. The Holy Spirit illuminates the human spirit and brings it into conscious experience of God. Do you know that Methodism taught that for 100 years in this country? Do you know that? Do you know that Baptists by the hundreds of thousands taught it on our continent? Did you know it? Do you know that Presbyterians used to preach that? Do you know the Salvation Army still does? Do you know that practically every holiness group and every deeper life group teaches it, so that I am not fanatical, neither have I suddenly gone berserk theologically. This is ordinary teaching, but it just happens that the kind of textualism which is in the harness right now, or which is in the saddle and riding a high right now, ignores all this. And I'm trying to restore it to you, not to teach something new, but to joyfully point to something that's been hidden.

When I was a boy out on the farm in Pennsylvania among the hills, we had snow in those days, real snow. Nowadays, we get a spotty effort at it, and then it disappears in no time at all. I don't know whether it's the administration or whether it's the atom bomb or what it is. But we don't have the old snows we used to have. We used to get the snow there and would lie there all winter. And then, it would begin to melt away. And as the poet William Wordsworth said, the snow would fair ill on the top of the bare hill and the ploughboy would be shouting anon--anon.

Well, then I as a lad would begin to find things that I lost last fall. Did you ever have that experience any of you? I'd begin to find things that I had lost last fall, a toy, a ball, a toy gun, or some little thing that I liked, a little wagon that had gone down under the snow that had come maybe when I was asleep and buried everything, I'd begin to find those things. And for a while thereafter the snow got off the ground, I was a rich boy. Same old things, but I had forgotten about them and didn't know where they were. And maybe I had asked for them and couldn't find them and nobody knew where they were. They'd been covered all winter by the snow. Nothing fanatical, nothing heretical about that. They were the same old treasures, boys' treasures not worth five cents in the market, but worth two million to me. And I would find them under the snow and I'd walk on air for a few days discovering my old treasures.

Now that's all I'm doing here today; I am telling you that which has been snowed under by the deep cold snows of textualism over the last years in our circles. And I'm reminding you only of that which now the snow is beginning to melt and we're seeing again. They belong to you. They're your treasures. And they're worth a million dollars to you. The Holy Spirit illuminates the human spirit and brings it into conscious experience of God and of spiritual realities, so you don't have to ask somebody do you think I'm saved? Neither do you have to read a book on seven ways you can know your converted. You know by the impartation of knowledge immediately without mediation. It's not contrary to reason. It is in line with faith. But it is so to speak when the altar flames and when the fire comes.

Now, I'm afraid to a great many people, God is simply the sum of what the Bible teaches about Him plus what we've heard about it, what evangelists stories, evangelists have told and tracts that we've read. And so we add God up and get a sum at the bottom of the column. And that is what God is to us. He's the sum of what we've learned about Him.

Now, suppose, young lady, that you are just married. Suppose you've been married a month. And I don't know your husband, never met him at all, and you come to me and begin to talk to me about your husband. And usually, it is a pleasant experience when they've only been married a month. And you tell me about him, and you show me his picture. And you tell me about his background, how many years he spent in service and where he was and all about him, and you give me his height and his weight and his characteristics, eye color and hair color and all the rest? Well, I add him up. And then you tell me about various facial features and his ears. Now, I couldn't do it. But a good artist could draw a picture of that man. A good artist could do it. And particularly, he could do it if three or four people came and confirmed each other's description and added a few details the other one had forgotten. Police reporters do that, police artists, after they've had four or five witnesses tell what a criminal looks like. They can draw a picture of the criminal that's simply astonishingly like the man.

Now, that is the way God is to most people. He is the picture they've drawn in their minds as a result of various descriptions they've heard about God from other people. But they simply don't know God himself. But now young lady, let me still address myself to you. You know him in a way that I couldn't possibly know him. All I know about him is what you've told me and what I've added up. And your husband, your young husband, is to me the sum at the bottom of the column. But what is he to you? You don't have to tell me. You don't have to reply. He is somebody you know. You know him immediately. And I know him only mediated to me through description and conversation and talk and reason.

Now, that's about all most people know of God, and almost all church people know of God. God is simply a sum at the bottom of the column. They learned from one evangelist that God one time got mad and killed the baby because the father wouldn't go to the mission field. Well, they put that down. Then they learn from another one that God made a dog bark under somebody when Uncle Peter died in Keokuk and they put that on the column. And then they learned also that the Lord answered prayer for a fellow one time that wanted to beat another fellow out of a business deal. And they put that down. And then they learn maybe that God is very holy, and they put that down inconsistently enough. And after they have learned about all he can know about God from books and songs and sermons and illustrations, and superstition, they add that up and they've got their God at the bottom, and they call Him Father.

I wonder if we ought not to send some missionaries from the Baliem Valley to Chicago to tell us Christian peoples want what God is like. I wonder if this God of the rank-and-file church member, this God that has been mediated through bits of information, true and untrue. I wonder if that God isn't as wrong a god and as surely an idol as the old bulls of Egypt, or the cats that they mummified and worshipped.

My brother, there's something better than that. In the first place, you can have a proper theological knowledge of God from the Scriptures. And the second place, you can have a direct knowledge of God through the Holy Ghost. Our God is not the sum of what the Bible teaches about Him. God is a great reality

Himself. And just as you and I must be satisfied to know that young man by description, and his young wife can know him by warm, living, personal contact and fellowship, so the church people seem contented to know God by description. And you and I can know God by acquaintance, if we only will.

Now, that corresponds to the last degree of knowledge in the last department or compartment of the court in that holy place, there is not even a candlestick. In that holy place, there's only the Shekinah glory, that awful holy fire between the wings of the cherubim. Thou that dwellest between the wings of the cherubim said the old Psalmist. And the Jews of olden days worshipped Him. They worshipped not a fire, but they worship Him who dwelt there.

And when the high priest once a year went into that place, he knew that fire by its warmth and by its light. And he could look at his hands and see them illuminated by that mysterious fire that had no origin on earth at all. It was not the sun or the moon or stars, for they were shut out. It was totally dark in there. It was not a candlestick, for that was in the compartment they called the Holy Place. This is the Holy of Holies, beyond the second veil. And there only, the light of God shines out. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. And they knew God, the priest could know God, the shining out of God by direct experience. Do you think those priests were anything but awestruck. Do you think those priests ever came out of there with their chins down and gloomy? Never! They came out of there with faces shining and with eyes like stars. They had looked upon God, the awful, glorious God that fills heaven and earth, and yet, would shine out of the Shekinah between the wings of the cherubim.

Now, what are the conditions? I suppose I should break this up really, and make it a fifth sermon, but I won't do it. I have kept you this far and I won't push my luck, as they say. So I'll talk about, about conditions and in 10 minutes be through. What are the conditions for thus knowing God? Well, of course, the first condition is to repent and be born anew. That's the first condition. You cannot arrive at any such a deep knowledge of God by nature. The natural man does not know the things of the Spirit of God and to him they are foolishness. There must be a repentance from sin and a turning to God through Jesus Christ, and a believing on Jesus Christ so that your soul is renewed. That's variously called regeneration, renewal, the new birth, but it's all the same thing.

Then there must be a renunciation. As long as you try to carry water on both shoulders and walk the fence between heaven and hell, and pleasing God and mammon, and be half in and half out, you will never know anything about God except that which you reason to by logical conclusions. There must be a renunciation of everything that displeases God. There must be a turning to God in fullness of determination, to walk with Him and be His. And then there must be a separation from and a separation unto. We're separated from everything that is unlike God, and we're separated unto God Himself, and God must be all in all. Now am I teaching anything that's too high? Flip your hymnbook open after I pronounce the benediction. Flip your hymn book open and go through the hymns and see whether you don't sing it there and don't know what you're singing about. See if it isn't there. Sure it's there.

And then there must be complete confidence in the mediator. Now, there is no approaching into that holy place without the blood of the Mediator. You could approach into the first place by the light of nature. Into the second, only if there had been a sacrifice and into the third only with blood of atonement. So, there

must be complete confidence in Jesus Christ, the Mediator. And there must be an anointing of the Spirit of God to illuminate us, and then a waiting on God with our open Bible. The Spirit can sometimes shine upon the Word and bring the truth to light. *To cite precepts and promises afford a sanctifying life.* That verse precedes the one we sang. *Her glory gilds the sacred page.* And who was that man? William Cooper, one of the greatest of the English poets, a great Calvinist, a great, I don't know, Presbyterian, or maybe a Episcopalian, but a great teacher, a man who's never been considered to be anything but sound in his theology. And he says that the Spirit of God shines upon the Word to bring the truth to light.

My brethren today, there must be, there must be an advance beyond this textualism that looks upon the cold text and says, I believe it. There must be an advance past that that says I believe it, and then moves on to a knowledge of God by the flash of divine light from God, so that I know within my heart and nobody can shake me. If you can be reasoned into salvation, a stronger reasoner can reason you back out of it again. If you know you belong to God by a reasonable conclusion, stronger reasons can cause you to conclude the opposite. But if by faith in the Mediator and the blood that He shed, you come to God and put away everything that's unlike him and look into His faith with expectation, He will give you a knowledge of Himself and heavenly realities that nobody reasons you into and nobody can reason you out of.

And that's what we're missing today. That's why we've got imitators instead of initiators. That's why we've got men and women who follow like sheep instead of men and women who lead like shepherds. And God help us take our Christianity seriously. For me, as far as I'm concerned, it's either a burning bush or I'll walk out on the whole thing. No hodgepodge compound of Norman Vincent Peale and David for me. It's either God everything or God nothing. And God turns around and says to us, either I must be your all or I won't be your anything. Christ must be Lord all of all, or He will not be Lord at all. Think it over, brethren. It's a serious thing.