

CHAPTER X

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

When Massillon arose to deliver the funeral oration of Louis XIV, his opening sentence was: "Only God is great." Luther once told Erasmus that his thoughts of God were too human. A person criticized a certain preacher by saying that he did not make God big enough. We believe this is a general fault of the ministry in this, our day: we do not make God big enough in our preaching. God is great, incomprehensibly great, in every attribute. The Psalmist says that "*Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite*" (Ps. 147:5).

The knowledge of God is called His omniscience, which means that His knowledge is universal, reaching to all things, to all persons, and to all events. The contrast between God and man is very marked. Man knows very little; his understanding has been darkened by sin. He begins his earthly career in almost complete ignorance, and after a lifetime of study knows nothing as he ought to know it: "*And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know*" (1 Cor. 8 :2). While in this world the wisest of men can hardly turn over the first page in the book of knowledge. And the smarter the man is, the more he realizes his ignorance. It is the fool who thinks he knows it all. Moreover, the more valuable a truth is, the denser is the ignorance of man concerning it. The truth about God and eternal things is the most valuable of all truth, and yet the ignorance of man is more evident here than on any other subject. Moral and spiritual truths are hid to the eyes of the wise and prudent and revealed to babes: "*In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight*" (Lk. 10:21). God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world with regard to spiritual things: "*Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*" (1 Cor. 1:20). The world by its own wisdom cannot know God: "*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*" (1 Cor. 1:21). To be wise every man must become a fool, that is, he must renounce his own reasonings and accept God's revelation about eternal things. "*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding*" (Prov. 3:5).

Paul preached the gospel to both Jew and Greek alike to the natural, prejudiced Jew it was a scandal, and to the natural, proud Greek it was foolishness: "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto*

the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;" (I Cor. 1:23). Before they could see the wisdom and power of God in the gospel of Christ, they had to be called; by which call their minds were illuminated by the Holy Spirit, so that the Gospel was no longer hid to them: "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24); "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4:4,6).

God's understanding is infinite: "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5). The original reads, "Of His understanding there is no number." The objects of God's knowledge are beyond computation. The mind of man does not have a mind that can fathom the knowledge of God. David wrote concerning the knowledge of God and, after a few lines, said, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Ps. 139:6). "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off" (Ps. 139:2). God observes us when we sit down to meditate, and when we arise to pursue the activities of life and He knows the thoughts that regulate all our ways. He knows our thoughts before we know them. Before a thought is our own, it is foreknown to God. God said of Israel, "And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore" (Deut. 31:21). God knew what their thoughts and actions would be before He brought them into Canaan. Christ knew what Peter's thoughts and words would be and predicted that he would deny Him. "And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice...And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mark 14:30,72).

"Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways." (Ps. 139:3). God knows our path and our pallet. He knows us when we awake and when we are asleep. "For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Ps. 139:4). God knows our speech. He knows when men take His Name in vain, and has declared that He will not hold such a man guiltless: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7). He knows when men

deny His word and "poke fun" at what He has caused to be written. And He hears the lowest whisper as well as the loudest cry. Men whisper when they wish to conceal their words, but God can hear our whispers, yea, even the mutterings of our heart.

"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me" (Ps. 139:5). David felt himself hemmed in by God. Truly there is no escape from God! *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me"* (Ps. 139:7-10). He is behind us, recording our sins; or in grace blotting them out. He is before us, knowing all our deeds, and providing for all our needs. God is a prison house of punishment to the wicked, and a haven of rest to His weary people. Every person has to have dealings with God, therefore *"prepare to meet thy God."*

"O Lord, in me there lieth not but to
Thy search revealed lies;
For when I sit, Thou markest it; no less
Thou notest when I rise;
Yea, closest closet of my thought hath
Open windows to Thine eyes."

How Does God Know?

1. God does not have to acquire knowledge. His knowledge is not the result of observation, consultation, or laborious study. It is no effort for God to know. Knowledge with man is attended with much labor; with man lifetime is school time.
2. God does not increase in knowledge. He knows no more now than He did centuries ago. His understanding is infinite from all eternity. He has always had perfect knowledge of all things. God does not need to enroll in any man's university. There are no school days with God.
3. God knows naturally. Omniscience belongs to the very nature of God; it is one of His personal perfections. Calvin defines Omniscience as "that attribute whereby God knows Himself and all other things in one eternal and most simple act." God's knowledge is all direct and without any intermediaries: *"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"* (Rom. 11:34).

The Objects of God's Knowledge

1. God knows Himself. Rational creatures are endowed by God with capacity to know themselves.

Even fallen men know something about themselves, of the composition of their bodies, and of the faculties of the soul. And if creatures know something of themselves, then the Creator, whose understanding is infinite, must know Himself perfectly.

Moreover, there is perfect acquaintance among the three persons of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit knows the mind of God, and can make intercession for the saints according to the will of God: *"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."* (Rom. 8:26,27). Jesus, speaking of God the Father, said, *"Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying."* (Jno. 8:55).

2. God knows His creation. He knows everything in nature. *"He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names."* (Ps. 147:4). The sparrow does not fall without His knowledge and consent.

God knows everything in the realm of human experience. He knows the thoughts of men, and the ways of men, and the words of men.

"Before men we stand as opaque bee-hives. They can see the thoughts go in and out of us, but what work they do inside of a man, they cannot tell. Before God we are as glass bee-hives, and all that our thoughts are doing within us, He perfectly sees and understands." (Henry Ward Beecher).

God knows the deeds of men. Men can hide their deeds from one another, but they cannot hide them from God. No human eye saw Cain murder Abel, but God witnessed the crime. *"And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground"* (Gen. 4:9,10). Achan no doubt thought he had committed the perfect crime when he stole the wedge of gold and hid it in the earth, but God brought his sin to light. *"And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done"* (Josh. 7:19,20). David covered up his sin with Bathsheba, but God uncovered it, *"Thou art the man!"* *"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; ...Now therefore the*

sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (II Sam. 12:7,10). There are no secret sins to God; "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

God knows the sorrows and trials of His people. *"And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;" (Ex. 3:7). Let us tell our sorrows to our Heavenly Father, for "Earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."*

God knows all events, past, present, and future. He knows all the past and never forgets. *"When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Ps. 9:12). Here is a verse for Hitler and all other war lords. It is merciful that we can forget some things of the past. Some men brood over the past until they are driven insane. This is not the proper attitude for the believer. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13,14). There is forgiveness with God through faith in His Son, and when God forgives us He remembers our sins against us no more forever. " Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isa. 38:17). "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. 44:22).*

God knows the present and the future. He knows the future better than men can know the past. God's perfect knowledge of the future is illustrated in the hundreds of fulfilled prophecies. Prophecy is the recording of events before they come to pass.

The Contemplation of God's Knowledge

There is no better exercise for the soul than the contemplation of the perfection's of God. Here is the secret of all true godliness. He who would live godly must be occupied with thoughts about God.

"The wicked hate the truth of God's knowledge. They wish there might be no Witness of their sins, no Searcher of their hearts, no Judge of their deeds" (A. W. Pink).

The wicked fail to remember that God remembers all their wickedness: *"And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face" (Hos. 7:2)*

The contemplation of the knowledge of God should fill the soul with adoring wonder. How great must be the One who knows all things! None of us knows what a day may bring forth, but God knows all that will take place in time and in eternity.

The infinite knowledge of God ought to fill men with holy fear. Everything we think, or say, or do, is known to Him to Whom we must give account. *"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"* (Matt. 12:36). Meditation upon this divine perfection will be a mighty check upon the waywardness of the flesh. In times of temptation we need to say as Hagar did, *"And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?"* (Gen. 16:13).

To be occupied with the infinite knowledge of God will fill the child of God with humility, adoration, and praise. *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God"* (Rom. 11:33).

The truth before us is an encouragement to prayer. There is no danger that our petitions will not be heard, or that our sighs and tears will escape the notice of God. No danger of the individual saint being overlooked amidst the throng of suppliants. An infinite Mind is capable of paying attention to millions as though only one man was seeking its attention. And we do not jeopardize our prayers by using inappropriate language, because God knows the thoughts and reads the intents of the heart. *"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"* (Rom. 8:26)