

PART 1:

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THE CREATOR

Section 1. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are closely connected.

If we wish to have real wisdom we must know two things: we must know God and we must know ourselves. In order to know one of these properly we must also know the other.

Knowing God.

We cannot think seriously about ourselves without thinking about the One who made us, and continues to care for us. The powers we have are such that we could not have made them ourselves, and we most certainly could not have given ourselves life. We receive so many things in this life that we must think of the Giver. More than this, the evil of our natures makes us turn to God seeking for better things. We want him to replace our ignorance, poverty, weakness and corruption with his true wisdom, wealth, power and righteousness.

Knowing ourselves.

In order to have a right knowledge of ourselves, we must know God and know what we are like in God's sight. Our human pride makes us think we are wise and holy, until we look to the Lord, whose perfection is the only standard we must be measured against. Then we find that we are hypocrites. We are content to *appear* to be righteous without having God's true righteousness. Our judgment is tainted by evil around us. Because of this, we think certain things are good when, in fact, it is only that they are not as corrupt as other things. In the same way, we may look from black to cream colour and, because our eyes are adjusted to the black, we think the cream is white. We need to learn that in God's sight our righteousness is sin, our strength is weakness, and our wisdom is folly.

The reactions of those who met God.

Saints who were conscious of the presence of God were filled with fear and amazement. Samson's father, Manoah, said: 'We shall surely die, for we have seen God' (Judges 13:22). Isaiah felt very strongly his own uncleanness. He cried out: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6:5). See also Ezekiel 1:28; 3:14; Daniel 8:18; 10:16, 17. From these people we can learn that humans have a sense of their own worthlessness when faced with the majesty of God.

Section 2. The meaning of knowing God.

To know God is not just to know that there is a God. God is not truly known by people who do not live a godly life. Some people know a little of God when they know that he created all things by his power and maintains them as they are. Some even realise that he governs humankind with wisdom, justice and loving care. But we can only truly know God when we also know that we have no wisdom, righteousness, power or truth except from him.

We need to seek all good things from him and thank him. Then we will realise that, since he made and keeps us, our lives belong to him. If we are his, our actions should be only what he wants us to do. We would turn away from sin. Our desiring to do good would not be from fear of punishment if we did wrong, but because we love him and fear to offend him.

Section 3. The knowledge of God is naturally planted in human minds.

There is some thought of a god of some kind in every human mind. God has given and continues to give this conviction. People have no excuse that they did not know there is a God. Even the fact that people bow down to idols proves that they think there is a God, someone above them who is worthy of worship.

We can easily see, then, that religion was not invented, as some critics have said, to keep down the common people. It is true that some have used religion to do this, but they could never have done so unless human beings had thoughts of God already deep in their minds. Some people may claim they believe there is no God, yet even they find times when they are forced to believe in a God they wish to forget. They fear punishment for their evil deeds.

The knowledge of God is not something people learn at school. They find this knowledge within, and cannot completely remove this truth, no matter how hard they try.

Section 4. This knowledge is stifled or corrupted by ignorance and wickedness.

While it is an indisputable fact that people have some idea that there is a God, very few treasure this thought. Some people are superstitious. Others deliberately choose wickedness. They are not just foolish. They have rebelled against God. Even if they think about God, they do not have a high enough opinion of him. With all this wrong view of God, they think they are wise. Paul says: ‘Claiming to be wise, they became fools’ (Romans 1:22).

David describes those who stifle the light God has given when he says: ‘The fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). Some of the wicked *say* there is no God. Others *act* as if there is no God. These David describes when he says (Psalm 36:2, 10, 11) that there is no fear of God before the eyes of the wicked, and that they flatter themselves in their evil ways with the imagination that God does not see them. At the same time, even those who wish to banish God from their hearts are faced at times by God’s standard of judgment. This judgment within them is the conscience.

Some think it does not matter what we believe so long as we try hard. But God does not change. His standards of right and wrong are not altered just to suit us. God must be known in the only right way or otherwise our view of him will be so wrong that it would be better not to have it at all. The apostle Paul tells the Ephesians that they were without God, so long as they erred from the right knowledge of the only true God. This is true of us. If we do not know God in the right way, we might as well worship idols.

It is also sinful if we never think of God unless we are forced to. The fear sinners have for him is forced from them by their fear of his judgment. They would even like to reverse his just decisions. Yet some of these same people make an outward show of being religious, while at the same time they are committing all kinds of sin.

There ought to be regular obedience to him through the whole of life, but sinners rebel against him by doing wicked things. Then they think they can regain his favour by a few sacrifices. By such evil doing the sparks of the knowledge of God are extinguished. Such people lose what knowledge God gave them about himself. In good times, they mock God. In bad times, they turn to him in despair. Their prayers at such times show they are not entirely ignorant of him.

Section 5. God can be known through the working of the universe.

God shows himself in the structure of the universe so clearly that we need only open our eyes to see him in his works. It is true that we cannot fully grasp his essence, for it is hidden from us. But there are clear and certain marks of his glory in what he has made. We have no excuse for not knowing him. We may turn our eyes to whatever part of creation we wish and see it glisten with something of the glory he has given it. The apostle Paul tells us (Romans 1:19) that God has shown himself to us in the works of his hands, so that the invisible things of him – his eternal power and Godhead – are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.

So many things show his wisdom. Scientists can now search more deeply into the secrets of divine wisdom to observe the movement of the stars and planets, sun and moon. They can measure their distance and admire their grandeur. But that does not mean that we who are not scientists have an excuse for not recognising the maker of these things. We have eyes. We can see how many, how varied and how orderly these heavenly bodies are. Quite clearly, God has revealed his wisdom in his wonderful works to ALL people.

In the same way, a carefully trained doctor recognises the structure, beauty and usefulness of the human body. Yet the framework of the body proves the great skill of its maker. Truly ‘[God] is

actually not far from each one of us' (Acts 17:27). Now, if we only need go as far as our own body to find the handiwork of God, we are inexcusable and lazy if we refuse to seek him. In fact this shows just how ungrateful we are. We have within ourselves God's great works and immeasurable gifts, and swell with pride that we are so gifted. We should be praising the giver.

People have used the word 'nature' so that they do not have to think about God. They say that 'nature' was the maker of all these wonderful things, everything from their eyes to the tips of their fingernails. Most of all the swift working of a human mind, its splendid powers of reasoning show plainly a creator. And yet people use these God-given powers to war against him.

Some people say the soul cannot exist without the body. Thus it would die when the body dies. But the soul does function independently of the body. It is nothing to do with the body when we study the skies. It is not with our bodies that we can consider past and future, remember what we have heard, hold a picture in our minds, and even have in our minds thoughts and pictures when we are asleep. These are further signs of God's handiwork in us. The marks of immortality can never be wiped from human nature. Surely human reason must compel us to acknowledge a creator.

Other people have tried to remove the idea of a true God by saying there is some sort of universal mind that gives life to the universe. This just replaces God with a shadowy power, and to such a power it would not be proper to give fear and worship. In matters of such importance, it is a mistake of serious consequences to confuse God with the things he has made, and with the workings of nature that are subject to his will.

We should therefore remember, whenever we think of our bodies, that there is one God who governs all things. It is his desire that we turn to him, believe on him and worship him. It is against all sound reason to use and enjoy the great gifts he has given us and turn away from the giver who continues to give us all we need.

Let us admire God's wonderful works. By his power he holds up the heaven and earth. He makes the sky shake with thunder, and lights it up with lightning. He stirs up the air with storms and calms them in a moment. He gives a boundary to the roaring waves of the sea, lashes them up to fury with wild winds and again brings peace. The power of God leads us to think of his eternity. He, from whom all things come, must be eternal. He must have existence within himself.

We can also see God's work in human affairs. He is kind to all, and yet he shows his working in such a way that he is plainly and constantly good to the righteous and severe to the wicked. He shows himself in punishment of crime, and just as clearly as protector and avenger of innocence. The fact that he sometimes allows the wicked to triumph for a while and allows the innocent to suffer hardship and oppression, does not hide his justice. In contrast to this thought, we should learn when he punishes one crime, that he hates all crimes. And when we see that he leaves many for the present unpunished, we should learn that there is a judgment to come, when they *will* be punished.

The psalmist teaches us about God's care in Psalm 107. God gave marvellous and unexpected help to the unhappy, protected and guided those wandering in the desert, gave food to the hungry, delivered prisoners from captivity, healed the sick, gave fertility to the earth, and raised the people who had been brought low. Many people think these come by chance, but the Psalmist shows they are God's care for his people and those who realise this will understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.

When we truly know God, we will look forward to the future life. When we know that God's present goodness and severity are incomplete, we must conclude that this life is only the beginning. There will be a fuller display of mercy and judgment in the world to come. When we see godly people suffer affliction from the wicked, while the wicked live in comfort, we are right to think there will be another life when both good and bad will receive the treatment that is right for them.

Augustine¹ wisely said: 'If every sin were now visited with punishment we might think that there was no judgment to come; and if no sin were immediately punished we might think that there was no such thing as divine power and care'.

In spite of the fact that God clearly displays his immortal power in his handiwork; humans do not learn from the lesson. We do not look often on the natural things around and think of the maker. We, too often, speak of events as chance, instead of realising they are God's work. The works of creation shine around us like lamps to show forth the glory of their maker. But they shine in vain. We do not take enough notice of them. But because they are there, we cannot say we had no way to know

¹ Augustine of Hippo (353-430) an important early Christian teacher and writer.