

Of the Knowledge of God.

by John Gill

The knowledge of God is essential for true godliness, and without it, there can be no good disposition in the mind towards God.

Scripture: Proverbs 19:2, Hosea 6:3, Matthew 11:27, John 14:17, John 17:3, Romans 10:17, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Ephesians 1:17, 1 Thessalonians 4:5, 1 John 4:8

Topics: "Knowledge Of God", "Spiritual Enlightenment"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the critical importance of the knowledge of God as foundational to true godliness and experimental religion. He argues that without knowledge of God, there can be no genuine worship, obedience, or affection towards Him, as ignorance leads to irreligion and idolatry. Gill illustrates that true knowledge of God is essential for understanding one's own state, the nature of sin, and the way to salvation through Christ. He contrasts the ignorance of the unregenerate with the enlightened understanding of the renewed, who know God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit intimately. Ultimately, Gill asserts that this knowledge is not merely intellectual but must be practical, leading to a life of obedience and communion with God.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 3

OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Since the knowledge of God and of divine things is a part and branch of true godliness, or of experimental religion, and a very essential one too, it is first to be considered; for without it there can be no good disposition in the mind towards God; for "ignoti nulla cupido", there are no affections for nor desires after an unknown object. And as we have seen there can be no true worship of God where there is no knowledge of God, as the cases of the Samaritans among the Jews, the Athenians among the Gentiles, and their wise philosophers show; there can be no cordial obedience to him by those who are ignorant of him; the language of such persons will be like that of Pharaoh (Ex. 5:2).

It is a false maxim of the Papists, that "ignorance is the mother of devotion;" it is so far from being true, that it is the parent of irreligion, will worship, superstition, and idolatry. Godliness, as has been observed,

is an assemblage of the graces of the Spirit of God in the hearts of his people, in the exercise of which experimental religion or internal worship lies; now there can be no grace without knowledge, no faith without it; the object must be known, or it cannot be rightly believed in.

The blind man's answer to Christ's question is a wise one (John 9:35,36). The Gentiles, who are described as such who "know not God", are also said to be "without hope", without hope and without God in the world; without hope in God and of good things from him now, and without hope of the resurrection of the dead, a future state, and enjoyment of happiness in it (1 Thess. 4:5,13), an unknown object cannot be the object of love; an unseen person may, "Whom having not seen, we love"; but an unknown person cannot be truly and cordially loved; God must be known, or he cannot be loved with all the heart and with all the soul.

The wise man says (Prov. 19:2). "That the soul be without knowledge is not good", or rather it may be rendered, "without knowledge the soul is disposed to that which is not good;"[1] it cannot be well disposed towards God, nor be fit for any good work, or for the right performance of any religious exercise, but is disposed to that which is evil; where ignorance reigns no good thing dwells. Now, 1. First, let it be observed, that while men are in a natural, unregenerate, and unrenewed state, they are destitute of divine knowledge; the time before conversion is a time of ignorance; this was not only the case of the Gentile world in general, before the gospel came unto them, but is of every particular person, Jew or Gentile (Acts 17:30; 1 Pet. 1:14), all the sons and daughters of Adam are in the same circumstances, for the illustration of which it may be noted, 1a.

First, that Adam was created a very knowing creature, being made after the image and in the likeness of God, which greatly lay in his understanding and knowledge of things; and while he continued in a state of innocence his knowledge was very great; it is not easy to say not to conceive how great it was; as he knew much of things natural and civil, so of things moral and divine; as he knew much of the creatures and their nature, so as to give suitable names to them, he knew much of God, of his nature, perfections, and persons, and of his mind and will, and of all necessary truths and duties of religion; for what by the light of nature and the works of it, and by the exercise of his own rational powers, which were in their full force and vigor, and by that nearness to God and communion with him he had, and by those revelations which were made to him by God, his knowledge must be very great.

But, 1b. Secondly, our first parents not being content with the knowledge they had, but listening to the temptation of Satan, who suggested to them that if they eat of the forbidden fruit they should be wise and knowing as God, they sinned and fell in with it, and fell by it, and so lost in a great measure that knowledge they had; for "man being in honour", as he was while in state of innocence, and "understandeth not", so he became by sinning, "is like the beasts that perish"; not only like to them, being through sin become mortal as they are, but because of want of understanding; yet "vain man would be wise", would be thought to be a wise and a very knowing creature, "though man be born like a wild ass's colt", which of all animals is the most dull and stupid; (see Ps. 49:12,20; Job 11:12). 1c.

Thirdly, Adam being driven from the presence of God, and deprived of communion with him because of sin, by which his nature was corrupted, darkness seized his understanding and overspread it, and greatly dispelled that light which before shone so brightly in him; and this is the case of all his posterity (Eph. 4:18). The darkness of sin has blinded the eyes of their understanding, that they cannot see and understand divine things; it has left an ignorance of God in them, to which are owing their want of a disposition to God, an alienation from him, and an aversion to a life agreeable to him; and this is the state

and case of all men, even of God's elect before conversion, who are not only dark but "darkness" itself, till they are made light in the Lord; and when the true light of grace shines, the darkness passes away (Eph. 5:8; 1 John 2:8). 1d.

Fourthly, this darkness and ignorance are increased by a course of sinning. Naturally man "is in darkness", he is born in darkness and continues in it, "and walketh in darkness"; and by an habit and custom in sinning increases the darkness of his mind; for notwithstanding the fall there are some remains of the light of nature in man; some general notions of good and evil, according to which the natural conscience accuses or excuses; but sometimes through a course of sin conscience is cauterized, seared as with a red hot iron, so that it is become past feeling, and insensible to the distinction of good and evil (Isa. 5:20). 1e.

Fifthly, there is in many an affected ignorance, which is very criminal; they are "willingly ignorant", as the apostle says of the scoffers who shall arise in the last time, or rather they are unwilling to understand what they might, "they know not, nor will they understand, they walk on in darkness"; they do not choose to make use of but shun the means of knowledge, and shut their eyes against all light and conviction; they do not care to come to the light, and love darkness rather than light; they do not desire to know God and his ways, but rather that he would depart from them; with such as these wisdom expostulates, saying, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?--and fools hate knowledge?" (Prov. 1:21; 2 Pet. 3:5; Ps. 82:5; John 3:19; Job 21:14). 1f.

Sixthly, Some, because of their sinful lusts they indulge themselves in, and their contempt of the means of light and knowledge, and the stubborn choice they make of error and falsehood, are given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart; as many among the heathens, who because they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, were given up to a reprobate mind, or to a mind void of judgment, and so imbibed notions and performed actions not convenient (Rom. 1:28), and the Jews, who rejected Jesus the Messiah against all light and evidence, had a spirit of slumber given them, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, nor understand with their hearts (John 12:40; Rom. 11:8), and the followers of Antichrist, who received not the love of the truth, had a strong delusion sent them to believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:10,11), others have been left under the power of Satan, the same with the power of darkness, who is the god of this world, and who is suffered to blind the eyes of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them (2 Cor. 4:4).

Now while men are in an unrenewed state, and in such a state of darkness and blindness, they are ignorant, 1f1. Of God, of his nature and perfections; for though they may by the light of nature, and from the works of creation, know that there is a God, and some of his perfections, as his wisdom, power, and goodness, which manifestly appear in them; yet not so as to glorify him as God, nor so as to preserve them from the worship of other gods besides him: indeed their knowledge of him is so dim and obscure, that after all they are said by their wisdom not to know God, the true God, this was the case of the Gentiles; and as for the Jews who had a revelation, yet they were "ignorant of the righteousness of God", which was the ground of their capital mistake in going about to establish their own righteousness and reject the righteousness of Christ.

And carnal men are very apt to think that God is such an one as themselves, and they measure him by themselves, and fancy that what is agreeable to the reasonings of their minds is approved of by him; or that he takes no notice of men and their actions, but leaves them to act as they please; that "the Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not" (Ezek. 9:9), and thus they live without God, or as atheists in

the world; or they think that God is a God of mercy, and will have mercy on them at last, but never think of his justice and holiness. 1f2.

They are ignorant of Christ, of his person and offices, and of the way of life and salvation by him; as they know neither the Father nor the Son, nor the distinction between them, so not the concern that each have in the salvation of men. "The way of peace they know not", how God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, forming the plan and scheme of reconciliation, and how Christ has made peace by the blood of his cross. 1f3. They are ignorant of the Spirit of God; "The world seeth him not, neither knoweth him" (John 14:17), neither his person nor his office, as a sanctifier and comforter; not the operations of his grace on the souls of men; Nicodemus, a master in Israel, could not conceive how it should be that a man should be born again of water and of the Spirit (John 3:8,9).

Nor can a natural man either receive or know the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned, and he has not a spiritual visive faculty to discern them (1 Cor. 2:14). 1f4. They are ignorant of themselves, and of their state and condition by nature; they think themselves rich and increased with goods, when they are wretched, miserable, poor, and blind, and naked; they fancy themselves whole, sound and healthful, and need not a physician for their souls, when they are sadly diseased and distempered with sin; they reckon themselves alive without the law, in a good condition, and in a fair way for life, heaven, and happiness, till the law enters them, and cuts off all their hopes of salvation by the works of it.

They are upon the brink of ruin, like a man on the top of the mast of a ship asleep, or in the midst of the sea, insensible of their danger; they rush into sin like the horse into the battle, and hasten like a bird to the snare, which knows not it is for its life. 1f5. They are ignorant of sin and the sad effects of it; if they have any notion of the grosser sins of life, and the evil of them, they do not know that lust in the heart is sin; not the evil of indwelling sin and corrupt nature; nor consider that the wages of sin is death, eternal death; they are not sensible of their own insufficiency and inability to make atonement for their sins, nor to work out a righteousness that will justify them from their sins. 1f6.

They are ignorant of the sacred scriptures, and the truths contained in them; though they are plain to them that understand, and right to them that find knowledge (Prov. 8:9), yet they are like a sealed book to carnal men, whether learned or unlearned; the one cannot read them because sealed, and the other because he is not learned (Isa. 29:11,12). The mysteries of the kingdom are delivered to them in parables, and they are riddles, enigmas, and dark saying to them; the gospel, and the doctrines of it, are hid from the wise and prudent; they cannot understand them, they are foolishness to them, and they pronounce them such.

But, 2. Secondly, in every renewed person there is a knowledge of God and of divine things; the new creature or "new man is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10). Spiritual and divine knowledge is a part of the new man, which is no other than an assemblage of grace consisting of various members, of which this is one; it is a part of the image of God and Christ enstamped upon the soul in regeneration, and which gives it a disposition godward; concerning which may be observed, 2a.

First, the object of it, God; before conversion men know not God, but after that they know him, or rather are known of him (Gal. 4:8,9), there is a threefold knowledge of God, or a knowledge of God that is come at in a threefold way. 2a1. There is a knowledge of God by the light of nature through the works of creation, which show his eternal power and Godhead, declare his glory, and display his wisdom and

goodness; and through the works of providence, by which he has not left himself without a witness of his Being and beneficence; and though these ways and works are past finding out, and a small portion of them is known by men, yet something of God is to be known by them, and that he is, as Jethro said, "greater than all gods"; but then such knowledge was always insufficient to teach men the true worship of God, and influence them to it; notwithstanding this, either they did not worship him at all, or ignorantly worshipped him; that is, not in a right way and manner; the wise philosophers of the heathens, though they in some sort knew God, yet they did not glorify him as God, nor serve him only, but worshipped and served the creature more and beside the Creator; nor was such knowledge effectual to make the hearts of men better, nor to mend their lives; those to whom God left not himself without a witness, by the works of creation and providence, still walked on in their own ways, and those very bad ones, walking in lasciviousness, lusts, drunkenness, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, even committing abominable lewdness in their religious services.

What a character does the apostle give of them (Rom. 1:18-32), even of those who professed themselves to be wise, both as to their hearts and actions? their foolish heart was darkened and their imagination vain, and they were given up to the lusts of their hearts and to the uncleanness of them, to vile affections and a reprobate mind, being filled with all unrighteousness and wickedness; what a dreadful portrait does the apostle draw of them (Rom. 1:29-31). Nor was this light and knowledge sufficient to point out to them the true way, how incensed Deity may be appeased, or sinners be reconciled to God; or by what means atonement for sin could be made, and therefore put such questions as in Micah 6:6,7 not the least hint did it give of a sin bearing and sin atoning Saviour, and of the blood of Christ which makes peace with God, and cleanses from all sin; nor could it give men any good ground to hope for pardon of sin on any account whatever; though they might presume on the mercy of God, and conjecture that he would forgive their sins upon their repentance, this they could not be sure of; at most it was but an "who can tell" if God will repent and turn from his fierce anger, as said the Ninevites (Jonah 3:9).

Nor was it sufficient to assure them of a future state of happiness, and describe what that is; as for the immortality of the soul, they had some faint views of it, and rather wished it to be true than believed it; of the resurrection of the dead they had no hope; and what that happiness of man hereafter they sometimes speak of, they had gross notions of, such as had any; and could not assure themselves by all their virtue that they should enjoy it. Life and immortality are only truly brought to light by the gospel. 2a2.

There is a knowledge of God by the law, the law of Moses, the moral law; though this came by Moses, it was of God, and shows what is his good and perfect will; it is a transcript of his nature, his justice and holiness; but then it only gives knowledge of him as a lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy, and as an incensed God threatening wrath to the breakers of it, without any hope of mercy, not even on the foot of repentance; it accuses of sin, the breach of it; pronounces guilty for it, and is the ministration of condemnation and death; by it is the knowledge of sin, but not of a savior from it.

The ceremonial law was indeed a shadow of good things to come by Christ; its sacrifices prefigured the sacrifice of Christ; it was the Jews schoolmaster that taught them Christ, and directed them to him. 2a3. There is a knowledge of God which comes by the gospel, the doctrine of grace and truth, that is by Christ, who lay in the bosom of his Father, and has declared him, his person, his nature, his grace, his mind and will to men; God has spoken by his Son, and made the largest discovery of himself by him; and makes use of the ministers of the gospel to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face or person of Christ, who is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person: and it is of this kind of knowledge of God in Christ, that souls are made partakers, when they are renewed in the spirit of their

minds; this is not a mere notional and speculative knowledge, such as the carnal Jews had, who had a form of knowledge in the law, and by breaking it dishonored God; and which some who call themselves Christians may have, who profess in words to know God, but in works deny him; who say, Lord, Lord, but do not the will of our Father in heaven: but this is a spiritual and experimental knowledge of God, such as a spiritual man has, and that from the Spirit of God as a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; and which leads men to mind and savour spiritual things.

This is a knowledge which is attended with faith in God as a covenant God in Christ; it is a fiducial knowledge, such as know his name put their trust in him, in whom is everlasting strength, and from whom they expect all supplies of grace; and having knowledge of him as their portion and exceeding great reward, they hope in him for what they want in time, and for happiness with him hereafter; and such knowledge always includes in it love to God, and the most cordial affection for him; "he who loveth not, knoweth not God" (1 John 4:8), for if he knew him he could not but love him, and say of him, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee".

Such knowledge is accompanied with a filial fear and reverence of God; where there is no knowledge of God there is no fear of God; but where there is knowledge of God, of his grace and goodness, and of his pardoning mercy in Christ, men fear the Lord and his goodness; for there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared; not with a slavish but a childlike fear; and where it is known he is so feared. And such a knowledge is practical, and it is known to be right by being so; "hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3), for such only may be said to be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding", in a true spiritual and evangelical manner, when the end for which they have it, and for which they desire it, is, to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing"; that is, to do the will of God in the most acceptable manner (Col. 1:9,10), and a knowledge attended with such graces and fruits of righteousness may be called saving knowledge; that is, salvation is annexed unto it and follows upon it; for "this is life eternal", the beginning of it, and in which it issues (John 17:3).

Now this knowledge of God may be considered as respecting the three divine persons in the Godhead distinctly, Father, Son, and Spirit; and that acquaintance and fellowship with each which such knowledge leads into. For there is a fellowship and communion which believers have with each divine person, which arises from their distinct knowledge of them (1 John 1:3; 2 Cor. 13:14). 2a3a. Every renewed soul has knowledge of God the Father. "I write unto you, little children", says the apostle John (1 John 2:13), "because ye have known the Father", the Father of Christ and their Father in Christ; for he that is Christ's Father is their Father, though they are not in the same class of sonship with him; "I ascend to my Father and your Father" (John 20:17), and this relation is made known to them, as children are taught to know their father; and this the saints know by the Spirit of adoption sent down into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father; and witnessing to their spirits that they are the children of God; and this leads into communion with him, and into the enjoyment of many privileges with pleasure.

They have knowledge of the love of the Father which is bestowed on them, and is in them, and which appears in their election, in the gift of Christ to them, and in their adoption, and in other blessings of grace; and this is shed abroad in their hearts by the Spirit, and they are led by him into the heights and depths, and lengths and breadths of it; they are warmed by it, and comforted with it; it is a source of joy, peace and comfort to them; and the knowledge of it is what they glory in and should do, and in that only (Jer. 9:23,24).

They have also knowledge of God the Father as having chosen them in Christ, and blessed them with all spiritual blessings in him; for though their election is so early as before the foundation of the world, and so secret as it is in Christ, yet it may be known by them; "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God"; how and by what means? by the powerful influence of the gospel upon their hearts, "for our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power" (1 Thess. 1:4,5), they have knowledge of him as their covenant God in Christ, who has blessed them with all covenant blessings, with the sure mercies of David; with justification by the righteousness of Christ, pardon of sin for his sake, reconciliation and atonement, adoption, and every other blessing; the knowledge of all which draws out their hearts in thankfulness to the Father of Christ, in love to him, and praise of him (Eph. 1:3,4).

They have knowledge of him as "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself", planning the scheme of their peace, reconciliation and atonement by Christ, "not imputing their trespasses" to them but to their Surety and Saviour; which scheme he has executed by him, and has "by him reconciled" them "to himself", of which they have knowledge, and hence reason in the strong and comfortable manner as the apostle does (Rom. 5:11). Moreover they have knowledge of God the Father as having proclaimed his name in Christ, a God "gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin"; as a God that does abundantly pardon, and which engages their souls to turn unto him, and fills them with wonder and amazement; so that they say, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" and this raises in them the highest gratitude and thankfulness to God; they call upon their souls, and all within them, to "bless his holy name, and not forget his benefits, who forgiveth all their iniquities" (Micah 7:18; Ps. 103:1-3).

To observe no more; they know him as "the God of all grace, who has called them to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus" his Son; that is, that he is the author and giver of every grace unto them; that their faith is not of themselves, it is the gift of God; that their good hope through grace is of him, and therefore he is called the God of hope, because not only the object but the author and giver of it; for the same reason he is called the God of love, the God of patience, &c. and this knowledge of God the Father leads to deal with him for fresh supplies of grace, and that he would make all grace to abound towards them; this draws them to the throne of grace to seek grace and mercy of him to help them in their time of need. 2a3b.

Every renewed soul has knowledge of Christ the Son of God (John 17:3), where the "only true God" designs God the Father, yet not to the exclusion of Christ the Son of God, for he is expressly called the "true God" (also 1 John 5:20) and "eternal life" is made to depend equally upon the knowledge of the one as upon the knowledge of the other; now would Christ ever have ranked himself in this manner with the only true God, if he was not equal with him? and such an interpretation of the passage as would exclude him from being the one only true God with the Father, would exclude the Father from being the one only Lord with the Son (1 Cor. 8:6).

Now truly gracious souls have knowledge of the person of Christ, as being truly God and truly man; as being true God, and therefore they venture their souls on him, commit their all unto him, and look unto him for salvation, and trust in him for it, because he is God and there is none else; and as being truly man, partaker of the same flesh and blood with them, and in all things made like unto them, and so their near kinsman, and who cannot but have sympathy with them; and thus being both God and man, he is fit to be the mediator between both, and to take care of things belonging to God, and to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

They have knowledge of him in all his offices, and deal with him as such; with him as their prophet to teach and instruct them by his word, his ministers, and his Spirit; with him as their priest, who by his sacrifice has

made atonement for their sins, and by his intercession pleads for every blessing for them; and with him as their king, to rule over them, protect and defend them; and they become willingly subject to his commands and ordinances, and esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right; they know him as their living Redeemer, as Job did; and their souls rejoice in God their Saviour, as Mary the mother of our Lord did; they know him in the various relations he stands in to them, as their everlasting Father, who bears an everlasting love to them, takes an everlasting care of them, and makes everlasting provision for them; as their head of eminence over them, and influence to them; as their husband, who has betrothed them to himself in righteousness and lovingkindness; as their brother, and one that sticks closer than a brother; and as their friend that loves at all times, and of whom they say as the church did, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend".

And this knowledge which such souls have of Christ is, 2a3b1. Not merely notional and speculative, such a knowledge the devils have: they know Christ to be the Holy One of God, and that he is the Son of God, and the Messiah (Luke 4:34,41), and men destitute of the grace of God may know and give their assent to those truths, that Christ is truly God, and existed as the Son of God from all eternity; that he assumed human nature in the fulness of time, that he lived a life of sorrow and trouble, died the death of the cross, was buried and rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, and is set down at the right hand of God, and will come a second time to judge the world in righteousness; but this spiritual special knowledge gracious souls have is, 2a3b2.

An affectionate knowledge, or a knowledge joined with love and affection to Christ; he is in their esteem the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; he is precious to them, and there is none in heaven nor in earth so desired by them as he is. 2a3b3. Their knowledge is a knowledge of approbation, they approve of him above all other lovers, and above all other saviors; they reject all others, and say, "Ashur shall not save us"; we will have no regard to our works, duties and services, as saviors; but they say of him as Job did, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him--he also shall be my salvation", I will have no other (Job 13:15,16). 2a3b4.

Their knowledge of him is fiducial; they know his name, his nature, his abilities, his fulness, and suitableness, and therefore they put their trust in him, give up themselves to him, rely and lean upon him, and trust him with all they have, and for all they want, for grace here and glory hereafter. 2a3b5. Their knowledge of him is experimental, they have their spiritual senses exercised on him; they see the Son and believe on him, see the glories of his person, the riches of his grace, the fulness of his righteousness, the efficacy of his blood, and the virtue of his atoning sacrifice; they "hear" his voice with pleasure and delight, the voice of his gospel, so as to understand it, approve of it, and distinguish it from the voice of a stranger they "feel", they handle him the word of life by faith, lay hold on him and retain him; they "taste" that the Lord is gracious, and "savour" the things which be of Christ and not of men. 2a3b6.

Their knowledge of Christ is appropriating; it does not lie in generals but in particulars, they know him themselves and for themselves; they do not only say as the Samaritans did, "We know that this is indeed the Christ the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42), but that he is their Saviour and Redeemer; and say with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God"; and with the apostle Paul, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me"; and with the church, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (John 20:28; Gal. 2:20; Song of Sol 2:16). 2a3c.

Every renewed soul has knowledge of the Spirit of God, the world does not know him, but truly gracious souls do; our Lord speaking of him says, "Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him", neither his person, nor his office, nor his operations; "But ye know him", meaning his

apostles and followers; and gives a very good reason for it, "for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you"; and therefore they must have a feeling and experimental knowledge of him (John 14:17).

Such as are renewed in the spirit of their minds, have a knowledge of him as a Spirit of conviction and illumination, he having convinced them of sin, the evil nature and sad consequences of it; of righteousness, of the insufficiency of their own righteousness to justify them before God, and of the fulness and suitableness of Christ's righteousness for that purpose; and having had the eyes of their understandings enlightened by him as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, as an able, willing, and complete Saviour; and having received him as the Spirit which is of God, whereby are made known to them the things that are freely given to them of God; the free grace gifts of righteousness, peace, pardon, and eternal life.

They have knowledge of him as the Comforter, who comforts them by shedding abroad in their hearts the love of the Father and of the Son; by opening and applying the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and by taking the things of Christ and showing them to them, and their interest in them; and these comforts they have a feeling experience of, for they delight their souls amidst the multitude of their thoughts within them; yea they walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and are edified by them.

They have knowledge of him also as the Spirit of adoption, who manifests to them their interest in this blessing; and not only from his witnessing do they know their relation to God as children, but also from their being led by him out of themselves to Christ, and into the truth as it is in Jesus, for such "are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14-16). Moreover they have knowledge of the Spirit as a "Spirit of grace and of supplication", who first works grace in the soul, and then draws it forth into act and exercise; and perhaps there is no season in the Christian life in which this grace is more drawn forth into exercise than when in prayer, public and private, under the influence of the Spirit of supplication; who helps saints under all their infirmities in prayer, and makes intercession in them according to the will of God, impresses a sense of their wants upon them, puts strength into them, and fills their mouths with arguments to plead with God in the exercise of grace: once more, such souls have knowledge of him as the Spirit of truth, that guides into all truth necessary to be known by them, and powerfully applies it to them; who teaches them all things they should know, and brings to their remembrance truths or promises, at proper seasons, for their relief and comfort; and who is the unction they have received from the Holy One, the anointing which teacheth all things, and from which they are denominated Christians; to say no more, they have knowledge of him as an inhabitant in them, for he dwells in them as in his temple; of whose indwelling they are sensible by the operations of his grace upon them; they find he is in them as the earnest of their inheritance, and as the sealer of them unto the day of redemption.

Now in this distinct, special, and peculiar knowledge of Father, Son, and Spirit, and in that communion with them, which arises from hence, inward experimental religion greatly lies. To this head of the object of knowledge all divine things may be reduced that are knowable, that are to be known or should be known by the Christian; there are some things that are not to be known, and which will, ever be known, neither in this life nor in that to come; there are some things that angels know not, yea which the human soul of Christ knew not in his state of humiliation; this is not to be called ignorance, but nescience, or non-knowledge.

"Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever" (Deut. 29:29). The former we should not curiously search into, as not belonging to us, nor should we exercise ourselves in things too high for us, and which are out of our reach, nor should

we seek to be wise above what is written; the latter we should study the knowledge of, and to improve therein, even the knowledge of each of the truths and doctrines of the gospel, so as to try and know the things that differ, and to approve the more excellent; and also of the will of God, or duties of religion, which are to be observed, that so we may walk worthy of God in all well pleasing.

The next thing to be considered is, 2b. Secondly, the causes of this knowledge, and from whence it springs. It is not to be attained to by the light of nature, or what light the works of nature give; for it may be said of this knowledge what Job says of wisdom and understanding, when he asks, "Where shall wisdom be found?" and "Where is the place of understanding?" to which he answers, it is not known by man, nor is it here nor there, nor can any estimation be made of it, only "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof"; what place it is to be found in, and in what way, and from whence it cometh (Job 28:12,23).

Nor is it to be found in the law of Moses; by that God may be known to be holy, just, and righteous, but not as a God gracious and merciful; by it is the knowledge of sin, but not the knowledge of Christ as a Saviour from sin; by it may be known what is the will of God with respect to what should be done and what should be avoided, but no knowledge does it give of the Spirit of God to help in the performance of duty, or in the exercise of grace. Nor is it to be acquired by carnal reason; the deep things of God, the mysteries of his grace, are what the carnal eye of man has not seen, nor his ear heard, nor has it entered into his heart to conceive of.

When Peter made that excellent confession of the Deity, Sonship and Messiahship of Christ, our Lord said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee"; not carnal reason, nor carnal men, "but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). This is not to be had from men; the knowledge the apostle Paul had of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, and of the glorious doctrines of the gospel, he had them not at the feet of Gamaliel, nor from his mouth, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11,12). 2b1.

The efficient cause of this knowledge is God; it is God that teacheth men knowledge, and none teaches like him; and this he teaches persons the most unlikely to learn, even such as "are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts"; that is, just weaned, who were but the other day babes and sucklings; this knowledge is from God, Father, Son and Spirit. Such as have "heard and learned of the Father, come to Christ"; that is, believe on him (John 6:45). It is the Father who knows the Son, and reveals him, as he did to Peter, and who reveals the things he hides from the wise and prudent, even unto babes; and "no man knows the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" (Matthew 11:27), he who lay in his bosom declares him, his mind and will, his love and grace; and he "gives an understanding" to "know" himself, who "is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20), and the Spirit, he is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God and Christ; he searches the deep things of God, and reveals them to men; and by him they know the things that are freely given them of God (Eph. 1:17; 1 Cor. 2:10-12). 2b2.

The impulsive cause is the sovereign will and pleasure of God. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matthew 11:25,26), it being solely owing to his good will and pleasure to make known to whom he would make known the mysteries of his grace and gospel concerning himself, his Son and Spirit; (see Col. 1:27). 2b3. The instrumental cause or means is the word of God. "Faith", which sometimes goes by the name of knowledge, "comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17), that is, by the external ministration of the word, the Lord owning and blessing it.

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, was appointed, commissioned, and sent of God "to give knowledge of salvation to his people"; and the apostles and ministers of the gospel had the treasures of evangelical truths put into their earthen vessels, "to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ". The ministry of the word is appointed as a standing ordinance in the church, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Luke 1:17; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 4:13). 2c.

Thirdly, the nature and properties of this knowledge deserve notice: and, 2c1. This knowledge is practical; the mere theory of any science, unless reduced to practice, is of little avail; men may have all knowledge that is notional and speculative, and yet be nothing; a profession to know God and Christ, and in works to deny them, is far from being saving knowledge; such who walk as other Gentiles do, have not truly learned Christ the gospel of the grace of God, when it comes with power, teaches men to deny ungodliness, and to live a sober, righteous, and godly conversation. 2c2.

It is of a soul humbling nature; as the instances of Job, Isaiah, and the apostle Paul show (Job 42:6; Isa. 6:5; Eph. 3:8), whereas other knowledge puffs up, makes men conceited, proud, haughty, and overbearing. 2c3. It is pleasant, savory, and satisfying; "he that increaseth" natural "knowledge, increaseth sorrow" (Eccl. 1:18), for the more he knows, he finds he knows less than he thought he did; and this gives him pain, that his knowledge is so small; and his larger knowledge attracts the envy of others, and raises an opposition to him; but spiritual knowledge, and an increase of that, yield him joy, peace, and comfort: we read of the "savour of the knowledge" of Christ, and of the savour of his good ointment; and of his name being as ointment poured forth, which emits a most fragrant and delightful smell (2 Cor. 2:14; Song of Sol. 1:3). 2c4.

This knowledge is excellent, yea super excellent; the apostle "Paul counted all things but loss for the excellency" of it (Phil. 3:8), it is to be preferred to gold and silver, to jewels and precious stones, and all desirable things (Prov. 3:13,14; 8:10,11), it far excels all other kind of knowledge. What if a man had knowledge of all the heavenly bodies, and of whatsoever is in the bowels of the earth, or dwells upon it, or grows out of it, so that he could with Solomon speak of trees and their nature, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; it would be nothing in comparison of the knowledge of Christ, and of God in Christ, since to know them is life eternal. 2c5.

This knowledge indeed is but imperfect in this life; those that know most only know in part, yet it is progressive; there is such a thing as growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ; the light of saints is an increasing one, the path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day; they that know the Lord shall follow on to know him, and shall know more of him, for so the words in Hosea 6:3 should be rendered; "and we shall know, we shall follow on to know the Lord", the "if" ought to be left out, not being in the original. 2c6.

There are various means which should be made use of for the increase of this knowledge, such as reading the scriptures, which are profitable for doctrine, and for instruction in righteousness; constantly and diligently searching into them, since they testify of Christ, of his person, and office, and grace; likewise attendance upon the ministry of the word, waiting at wisdom's gates, and watching at the posts of her door, which is the way to find wisdom and get understanding; also frequent and fervent prayer, if "thou criest after knowledge", thou shalt "find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3,5), great is the encouragement given to make use of such a method; (see Jam. 1:5; Matthew 7:6).

Conversation with wise and good men, and such as fear the Lord, who by conferring together find the advantage of it; they build up one another on their most holy faith, establish each other in it, and increase in knowledge; for "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise", grow wiser and wiser (Prov. 13:20).
ENDNOTES:

[1] Vid. Vatablum in loc.

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