



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Knowledge and Wisdom of God, part I”

[Prayer] We thank Thee again for the Scriptures, that they are inspired of God, that they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfectly fitted out for every good work. And as we turn again to the Scriptures to consider aspects of Thy being, Thy nature, Thy character -- specifically Thine attributes -- we pray Lord that the Spirit may enlighten us. Illuminate the Scriptures for us, and enable us to understand the things that have been written concerning Thee. We acknowledge that all worship and all praise should be directed to Thy name, and we do this. And may Thy name be lifted up and exalted as we consider what Thou hast said to us.

And we pray in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight is “The Knowledge and Wisdom of God,” and I must say at the beginning that I had hoped to consider both of these attributes tonight, but in reviewing and in doing some fresh study in this particular doctrine, I find it necessary to, not only study it tonight, but also next Tuesday night. And so this is the first of a two part series on “The Knowledge and Wisdom of God.”

For Scripture reading, I want you to turn with me to Psalm 147. Psalm 147, and I’m going to read verses 1 through 6, but I want you to particularly notice verse 4 and 5. Psalm 147, verses 1 through 6. And I’m reading from the New American Standard Bible. “Praise the Lord; for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is becoming. The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the broken hearted, and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars. He gives names to all of them. Great is our Lord and abundant in strength. His understanding is infinite. The Lord supports the afflicted. He brings down the wicked to the ground.” Now notice particularly, verse 4 and 5. “He counts the number of the stars. He gives names to all of them. Great is our Lord and abundant in strength. His understanding is infinite.”

The knowledge and wisdom of God. Has God ever learned anything? Is he ever surprised? Is he ever amazed? Does he ever wonder? If he knows everything -- past, present, future -- is this compatible with human free agency? Why does the Bible say, “Be ye holy” and not “Be ye happy?” Now we hope to answer these questions in the course of tonight and next Tuesday night’s study. We are studying, as you know, those of you who have been here, the attributes of God. And we have been looking at the incommunicable attributes. These are the attributes, which stress the absolute being of God. Now we have studied self-existence, simplicity, unity, spirituality, infinity, immensity, omnipresence, eternity, immutability. These are the incommunicable attributes. They are attributes, which stress, as we said, the absolute being of God.

Now the communicable attributes stress his personal nature by which he enters into relationship with others. And tonight, we’re looking at the first two; knowledge and wisdom. Now, they are of course, closely related, and it’s only natural that we should consider them together. So our subject is “The Knowledge and Wisdom of God.” First of all, you’ll notice our outline, Roman I: The Nature of the Knowledge of God.

How would you define the knowledge of God? One theologian has defined the knowledge of God as "that perfection of God whereby he, in an entirely unique manner, knows himself and all things possible and actual, in one eternal and most simple act." Let me read it again: "that perfection of God whereby he (and I'm going to skip the clause, next clause, because it really is not important) that perfection of God whereby he knows himself and all things possible and actual, in one eternal and most simple act." So we can see from this that the knowledge of God is the knowledge of himself and the knowledge of all things that flow out of himself; whether actual or only possible. And furthermore, God knows these in one simple and eternal act.

When speaking of the present, we call God's knowledge, "knowledge." When we speak of the past, we call it his "remembrance." I'm using biblical terms. When speaking of the future, the Bible refers to "foreknowledge." So it is "knowledge" if we are talking about the present. It is his remembrance of things past. It is his "foreknowledge" of things in the future. And when we think of the universality of the things that God may know, then we call it "omnipotence" or "the capacity for knowing everything."

Omnipotence. Now you'll notice that our text that we read, Psalm 147, verse 5 states this. It says, "His understanding is infinite." Now these two verses -- or this verse itself -- is significant, in that it begins with a statement of what he is in his essence. "Great is our Lord." Then, a statement concerning his power, "And abundant in strength." And finally, his knowledge, "His knowledge is infinite." His understanding is infinite. In one other place in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel chapter 2, verse 3, the Bible says, "The Lord is a God of knowledge." And I think it's interesting when one reads the Hebrew text, to discover that that word "knowledge" is in the plural. The Lord is a God of knowledges.

Now I think the stress of that is upon the breadth of the understanding of God, but it surely includes all kinds of knowledge that God may have. Now when we think of God, one of the most -- one of the most primary, or -- one the most significantly first things that we think of, when we think of God, is the fact that he is a God who knows

everything. People who don’t know much about God know that he is a God who is supposed to know everything. And this is a form of knowledge that even pagans have -- those who do not know anything about Christianity. For example, in ancient times, Cicero spoke of God as, “Life is the knowledge of the gods.” *Scientia, deorum, vita* -- or “wita.” And so the idea of the knowledge of God being significant is something that was known in ancient times.

In ancient times God was called by pagans, *nous*, which in Greek means, “mind,” and again, the association of God with knowledge. Some called him *epoptais* or “the inspector of everybody.” The one who knows everyone and everything because he looks out over everything. They called him, *intellectus* because he was the author of all knowledge and understanding in his creatures. Intellect. So the idea of God being a God of knowledge is not simply a Christian idea, but it is an idea that has permeated all religions.

Now let’s think for a moment or two about the nature of this knowledge of God -- and I’ve listed some things that are true of the knowledge of God under Capital A through Capital G. And the first one is: The Knowledge of God is Intuitive, not Discursive. And I will explain these terms. I hope maybe by a year or so after we’ve gone over a lot of these terms, pretty soon you will know the theological significance of these terms.

Now I’m sure that you know what intuition is. Every woman knows what intuition is, and every man knows what intuition is; if you know the woman. Now intuitive, however, is not really used in quite that sense theologically. When we say that the knowledge of God is intuitive, we mean that it is not obtained by comparing one thing with another. That is, it is something that God possesses directly. As we said in our definition, the knowledge of God is that perfection by which he knows himself, and all things possible and actual in one eternal and most simple act. Intuitively, God knows everything. Intuitively, he has knowledge. He does not have to gain knowledge, acquire knowledge -- such as you and I do -- and he never loses it by forgetting it -- such as you

and I do. His knowledge is intuitive. It is not discursive. He does not gain his knowledge by deducing one thing from another. He doesn't say, "Now given this, then this must be true. And if this is true, then this must be true. And if this true, then this must be true." He does not have to reason like a mathematician does, nor a logician, because that would involve ignorance at certain stages in the process. But God knows his knowledge intuitively, not discursively. He knows everything in one direct vision.

Now as the Jerusalem Conference expressed it in Acts chapter 15, verse 18, James is speaking. He says, citing from the Old Testament says, "The Lord who makes these things known from of old -- who makes these things known from of old." He knows everything intuitively, not discursively.

Second, his knowledge is simultaneous, not successive. He does not receive his knowledge gradually. He did not attend some ancient university of eternity, and in a series of courses, gather his information together so that he finally reached the place where he knew everything. It is not, as Charnock, who has written perhaps the greatest book on the attributes has said, "It is not a knowledge by drops. The perception is total and instantaneous." Now it's difficult for us to even think of God knowing everything totally and instantaneously. It's as if I were to walk into the library of the Dallas Theological Seminary and in one moment should know everything that is in every book there in one instantaneous act. It's just as if I were to enter the Congressional Library in Washington for the first time and immediately in the presence of the book -- books -- know everything that is in the millions of volumes that are in that library. In fact, the knowledge of God, being infinite, is the knowledge of everything in one instantaneous act of direct vision. So his knowledge is simultaneous. It is not successive.

Third, his knowledge is independent, not dependent. He has no books. He has no tutor. His knowledge is totally of himself. He did not learn aspects of his knowledge from us when we came along. We are not teaching God anything. He is not learning

anything from our experiences. I think at times he must be amused at the things that we do, but he is not surprised. He is not amazed. He does not wonder. He does not learn.

Now will you turn with me to Isaiah chapter 40, verse 13. Isaiah chapter 40, verse 13. Now you’ll remember that when we talked about the Trinity, we pointed out that the attributes of one person of the Trinity are the attributes of all the persons of the Trinity. For example, if we can show that Jesus Christ is omnipotent thereby, we have shown that each person of the Trinity is omnipotent, for we have already demonstrated that the Trinity is one God who subsists in three persons, and that each person of the Trinity possesses all of the essential attributes of deity. So I don’t want to have to -- every time we come to a text that speaks of the Spirit, or of the Son -- have to prove again that the Son or the Spirit possesses the essential attributes of deity. We have already proved that, and we are resting upon that for further information. Verse 13 reads, “Who has directed the spirit of the Lord or as his counselor, has informed him?” And so there is no one who has directed the spirit of the Lord. There is no counselor who has informed him. He does not have any tutor. He does not learn anything from anyone else.

Fourth, the knowledge of God is distinct, not indistinct. It is infinitely clear and complete. Now I know what you’re saying. It may be infinitely clear and complete to God, but that which he has revealed to me is not so clear and complete to me. That may well be true. The incompleteness -- the indistinctness, I should say -- of the word of God to you may be due to several things. It may be due to your own immaturity. It may be due to your carnality, for if you are a carnal Christian, you cannot understand the deep things of the word of God. Now they are beyond you. And if you are not a Christian, then you cannot even understand the milk of the Word.

People often say, “Well what is the milk and what is the meat in the New Testament?” Well we would normally say, “Well the milk of the Word is the simple, doctrinal structure of the New Testament; some of these things that I’m talking about -- milk of the word.” But if we wanted something that we knew was the “milk of the word,”

we should turn to 1 Corinthians because remember, in that epistle, Paul says that he could not -- when he came to them the first time to preach the Gospel to them -- he could not speak to them the meat of the word because they were babes, although they were in Christ. And then he says -- in this epistle -- about the third verse, "Neither yet now am I able to instruct you in the milk of the word -- in the meat of the word -- for you are not yet able to take the meat of the word." And so 1 Corinthians is the milk. He has told us that -- in that epistle -- he is going to give them what they can take. They cannot take the meat.

Now that means then that such doctrines as the wisdom of God in the first four chapters -- the doctrine of illumination -- that's just milk. The doctrine of discipline in the church -- chapter 5 -- that's just milk. The doctrine of going to law before unbelievers, the doctrine of divorce and related issues, the doctrine of meat sacrificed to idols or indifferent things, the doctrine of love, the doctrine of spiritual gifts. Think of that. The doctrine of spiritual gifts, that is milk -- that's the milk of the word. And the great doctrine of the resurrection in chapter 15, and other related truths. Well that is just the milk of the Word.

Now God in his knowledge is distinct. His knowledge is distinct, not indistinct. But it may be indistinct to us because we have not met the conditions for understanding the truth of God. You know, it is a tremendous challenge when we read that there is milk and meat, and that one does not understand meat unless he is spiritual. It is a tremendous incentive to spirituality -- because I must confess -- I want to know the deep things of the word of God. And I don't want to be satisfied with the milk of the word. God's knowledge is distinct, not indistinct. Infinitely clear.

Notice Isaiah 40, verse 26. "Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars. The one who leads forth their hosts by number. He calls them all by name. Because of the greatness of his might and the strength of his power, not one of them is missing." Now what is more distinct than to know the number of the stars and their

names? If there is no way in which the sun -- in which Isaiah may express the distinctness of the knowledge of God any clearer than that. Back in Psalm 147, verse 5 it says, "He counts the number of the stars. He gives names to all of them. His understanding is innumerable." That's the rendering literally, of infinite.

Now scientists tell us that actually, we do not know how many stars there are in the firmament, or in space. As a matter of fact, we don't even know what is in our galaxy, and as I understand it, scientists tell us that there is almost an infinite number of galaxies, so far as they know. And yet, against the background of that Isaiah says, and the Psalmist says, "He knows everyone of them. He knows the number of them. He knows the precise name of them." They're not floating around as if they were dark enigmas to God. He knows every one of them. His knowledge is completely distinct. Clear.

Fifth, it is infallible, not fallible. As regarding certainty, his knowledge is infinite, or infallible. What he knows is as certain as what he says. And he lays a great deal of stress upon the fact that in the Bible, when he says something, it is sure to come to pass. What he knows is just as infallible as what he says. You know, our Lord refers to something like this when he says in Matthew chapter 5, verse 18, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law until all is accomplished." And he refers to the fact, that in the Hebrew language, there is a little letter called a *yodh* which looks like an apostrophe, and then he refers to the fact that there is a little appendage to one of the letters that marks the distinction between say a *reish* and a *dalet*, and the only difference is just a little tiny line that extends above the horizontal line. And referring to this he says, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law until all is accomplished." And what he means to say by that is that, everything that God has said in his word -- literally -- everything shall be completely fulfilled. It is absolutely infallible.

Well now the knowledge of God is just as infallible as the things that he says. So it is completely infallible.

Seven -- sixth rather. It is immutable, not mutable. Now we’ve used immutable long enough that -- for most of you I know -- I don’t have to translate that any more. His knowledge is unchangeable, not changeable, immutable, not mutable. His knowledge does not change. He does not grow wiser. He does not learn that some things are better expressed in another way. He doesn’t learn new aspects of the truth. No scientist ever discovers anything that surprises the Lord, makes it necessary for him to change anything in the Word he has spoken. One of the great struggles that goes on in the world is the struggle over Christianity and science, but God is not disturbed by that at all. In the long run, he knows that his truth shall be completely, clearly, distinctly, infallibly vindicated.

And finally, it is complete, not incomplete. There is no acquiring, no forgetting, but as the psalmist says, “His understanding is infinite.” It not only is absolutely clear, in so far as it is addressed to any object. But it encompasses all of the objects that are objects of his knowledge, as well as himself. So that is the nature of the knowledge of God. Now we said a lot of the same things, just looking at it in different ways.

Let’s move on to the extent of the knowledge of God. The extent of the knowledge of God. I think we could say that God is necessarily omnipresent because of his immensity. Do you remember that we said that, “He fills all the space of the universe and beyond.” He is immense. Now because he fills all of the space, he is omnipresent. There is no place that God is not present. He is here, and he is there. And it is not a part of him that is here, and a part here, and a part there, but he is completely present throughout his universe. He is immense and, therefore, omnipresent. Now because he is infinite, he is also omnipotent. So we say he is necessarily omnipresent because of his immensity, and he is necessarily omnipotent because of his infinity.

If God were ignorant, who would pay any attention to him? If he were ignorant, would you pray to him? If he were ignorant, would you seek to serve him? You can see

that the knowledge of God in its infiniteness is of tremendous significance for our practical Christian living. I must say that my old nature does not like to pray. And if I had any question whatsoever about the fact that God’s knowledge was infinite, and his power infinite -- if I did not know all of these things about God -- I’m sure that I would not come to him to pray to him, and I surely would not want to serve him.

Now, first of all, in answering the question on the extent of the knowledge of God, his knowledge is both necessary and free. Now here I’m going to have to make a theological distinction for you. Necessary knowledge is the knowledge of God and all things possible, which rests on the consciousness of his omnipotence. When we say that God’s knowledge is necessary, we mean then that the knowledge of God is the knowledge of all things possible in the universe. That is necessary knowledge. He must know all of that which is in his universe. That is necessary knowledge. He cannot keep it from himself. He knows everything. He must know everything. That’s his necessary knowledge.

Now his free knowledge is to be distinguished from that. His free knowledge is knowledge that is of all things actual, past, present and future. And it is free because it is determined by his will. He does not have to say, “I will know all things necessary.” He necessarily knows all things. That necessary action of God is not dependent upon his will. He just knows it. But there are certain things that he knows because he has willed them. Now that is his free knowledge. For example, he knows the number of the stars. He calls them by name. That is his necessary knowledge. But he knows that S. Lewis Johnson, Junior is elect also. That’s his free knowledge, for he has determined that I shall be among the elect. He has chosen me. So the knowledge that is the result of the action of his will is his free knowledge.

The knowledge that is necessary is the knowledge that he has instantaneously of everything in his universe. So his free knowledge is the knowledge that governs my election. It governs my life. It governs providence, that as it pertains to me. It has to do

with his plans and purposes for me, and he knows all of that, too. And not only of me, but he knows that of all of the elect. And furthermore, because this kind of knowledge is free -- that which is determined by his will -- he also knows everything about the non-elect too. For that too is included within his overall plan, in his decree. So in his eternal decree by which he decreed all things that shall come to pass.

Do you believe that? Well if you don’t, let me remind you of what this omnipotent God has said, “He works all things according to the counsel of his own will.” That is his free knowledge. Everything is being carried out in accordance with his will. He works everything according to the counsel of his will. Everything that takes place is the result of the specific decree of God. You don’t like that, do you? Some of us.

Now if you’re puzzled over it, that’s all right, because most at some degree or other, are puzzled over it. But nevertheless, it’s true. That is his free knowledge. So his knowledge is both necessary and free. His knowledge includes that which is the product of his will that -- the action of his will -- that which is not the product of the actions of his will.

Second, or B. His knowledge is of himself. Now if I should say that the thing that I know the most and the thing I want to know the most is myself, you might say, “Well, Dr. Johnson is conceited and interested only in himself, and I’m not surprised that he should want to know himself. He finds new pleasure every day in discovering things about himself.” Now that would not be true of any person of course. But in the case of God, he is the only perfect being in the universe. And consequently, the knowledge of God must be, first of all, the knowledge of himself. 1 Corinthians 2, verse 11 says, “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him. Even so, the thoughts of God or the things of God, no one knows except the spirit of God.” God knows himself.

Now the fact that he knows himself, and knows himself personally, means he excels all of us, for the knowledge of God is the highest that one can have. I’ve always

liked that text because it stresses the fact that only I know me, and only you know you. What man knows the things of the man except the spirit of the man within him? Notice that’s little “s” in the New American Standard Bible -- the spirit of the man, which is in him. Well just as I know myself, So God knows himself. “Even so, the things of God knows no man except the spirit of God.” And so the spirit of God knows God, but he knows God perfectly. I do not even know myself perfectly. But God knows himself perfectly, and in that, he is greater than his creatures. By the way, if he did not know himself, he would be under the greatest ignorance because he would be ignorant of the most excellent object of knowledge in the universe, which is God himself. So he knows himself, and he knows himself completely. If he did not know himself, he could not create because he would not know his power. He would not know what he could do. He could not govern. He would not know how to control this universe if he did not know everything about himself, as well as everything about his universe. So his knowledge is of himself.

Third, his knowledge is of all things. Now this is inclusive of all things possible, all things actual, whether past, present or future. Now let’s look up a few verses in order to show this. This is inclusive of all things possible. Turn with me to Romans chapter 4, verse 17. Romans 4, verse 17. “As it is written, a father of many nations have I made you, in the sight of him whom he believes. Even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.” He calls into being that which does not exist. He knows all things possible, and he has power over them.

Now furthermore, he knows all things actual, whether in the past, present or future. Turn back to Isaiah chapter 41. Isaiah is a great prophet of the knowledge of God, and in chapters 40 through 48, are some very interesting passages on the knowledge of God. He writes against the background of the idols who could not see, who could not hear, who could not move, and that makes a wonderful contrast with Isaiah’s God. Isaiah chapter 41, verse 21. “Present your case, the Lord says.” He’s challenging the heathen

gods and idols. "Present your case, the Lord says. Bring forward your strong arguments, the king of Jacob says. Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place. As for the former events, declare what they were, that we may consider them and know their outcome or announce to us what is coming." And so God challenges the idols and the heathen gods by saying, "Tell us what things have actually come to pass. Give us an insight into them. Interpret them for us, and tell us what is going to come to pass." That is the challenge that is flung out to the false gods.

So God's knowledge is not only of himself, but of all things possible, and all things actual. It is even of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews chapter 4, verse 13 expresses this. Hebrews chapter 4, verse 13. Let me read verse 12 while you're finding Hebrews 4. "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. All things are bare, laid open before the eyes of him whom we have to do." So God not only knows the things that are possible, he knows the things that are actual. He not only knows the present, he knows the past. He not only knows the past, he knows the future.

That is illustrated all through the Bible. It is illustrated, for example, in the fact that God named, not only the -- not only said that there would come one who would deliver Jerusalem during the time of the captivity, but he even named his name. He called him "Cyrus" long before he was born. Even men know some future things. A physician may know what is going to happen to you, on the basis of certain signs which he knows as regular causes for certain things. Astronomers know what is going to happen. They tell us when we're going to have an eclipse. And God, who has infinite knowledge, has infinite knowledge also of all things past, present and future.

Not only that, he knows all contingencies. He knows what would happen if certain things did happen, and occasionally, we find evidences of that in the Bible. He refers to the inhabitants of Kelah in speaking with David and says to them -- to David, "If you stay here, they are going to betray you to Saul." And as a result of that information from God, David wisely fled, for God knew what had taken place in their hearts. So he knows the contingencies of things. Now we may think that things happen accidentally. We may think that it was just a chance meeting when things take place. As a matter of fact in the Bible, we have some words used in that way -- in that human way.

Now Dr. Ryrie was speaking in Chapel the other day, referred to Luke chapter 15 or so, and the -- the story of -- or rather, Luke chapter 10 I think -- and the story of the Samaritan. And he said that -- he referred to the verse, which says that, "He by chance, passed down the other side." And made reference to the fact that that was a very un-Calvinistic statement. He did it of course, jokingly. But it is an instance of God speaking in the language of men. Things do not happen by chance in the world of God. They happen by chance in our world, but not in God's world. Everything is planned and plotted out because he knows it all, having determined it all.

Take the case of Judas. Judas I think is a good illustration of the things that God knows. In John chapter 13, verse 21, the disciples are at the last Passover, and we read when Jesus had said this. John 13:21, "He became troubled in spirit and testified and said; 'Truly, truly I say to you, that one of you will betray me.'" Now this is some instance of his knowledge of what was going to happen in the future. "The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one he was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus' breast, one of his disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore, gestured to him -- that is, to John who was leaning on his bosom -- and said to him; 'Tell us who it is of whom he is speaking.' And so John leaned back, being on the breast of the Lord and said to the Lord; 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus therefore answered; 'That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.' So when he had dipped the morsel,

he took and gave it to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot.” Now here Judas is known ahead of time as the one who is to betray our Lord.

Now this knowledge -- that is, the knowledge of God -- is the knowledge of all things past, present and future. By the way, occasionally when we read the story of Judas, we are inclined to feel a little sorry for him, and think that he was caught up in circumstances over which he had no control. That is not true. We are also inclined to think, Well Judas, since it was prophesied that -- that he should betray our Lord -- when he betrayed the Lord, then really, we shouldn’t blame him, because he was just carrying out what had been pre-determined. Well now, you know, the Lord does not agree with theology like that.

As a matter of fact, he expresses it very strongly. He speaks about Judas’ betrayal; about the one who is going to give him over, and that it has been written that he should. But he says, “Woe to that man, by whom the Son of Man is handed over.” And so, not only are we taught that Judas’ action is a free action, but we are taught that he is responsible for his action, and we are taught also, that it was prophesied that he should do precisely that. And all of these things are true. Now the fact that Judas recognized that it was a free action on his part, is evidenced by the fact that, when this thing took place, afterwards, he went out and -- the text of Scripture said -- he “regretted what he had done and he committed suicide.” He recognized that, though it was known ahead of time that he would do this by our Lord, nevertheless, he recognized that he was wrong in what he had done. And so he acknowledged his own responsibility, even though he was the object of divine foreknowledge. Now if your mind is not big enough to grasp all of that, well, don’t -- again -- don’t be discouraged. Now we are, by theology, hoping to stretch it a little.

Now let’s consider as we close tonight, a couple of problems, some problems in the knowledge of God. Even this doctrine has its problems. And the first problem is: Can God foreknow free action? Can God foreknow man’s free actions, and therefore,

conditional events? I think we can all see how God may foreknow necessary actions, but it sometimes is difficult for us to see how he knows beforehand, actions that man freely originates. How can he know them? As a result of this, some have denied on the one hand, the foreknowledge of God. They've said -- such as, certain Arminians and the Sosinians -- God does not foreknow anything in the future. And then on the other hand, there are those that persuaded that God has decreed all things. They have taken such an extreme position that they have ruled out any free agency on the part of men.

Now I'm not saying free will. Man does not have free will. But man has a free agent. Well, he does what he wants to do. He's not coerced into his decisions. And so we have this -- these two poles. On the one hand, God's foreknowledge -- certain foreknowledge of what is going to come to pass -- and on the other, man's free agency. His decisions are his decisions. And how can we reconcile them?

Now Scripture teaches clearly the divine foreknowledge of contingent events. We don't have to worry about that, because the Bible is very clear on that point. Take for example, one that is near our passage that we last looked at. Matthew chapter 11, verse 21. Our Lord says, "Woe to you Chorazin? Woe to you Bethsaida. For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." He knows contingent events. He knows the future. He knows the past. So there is no question but that the Bible teaches the divine foreknowledge of contingent events. It says concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and his crucifixion, it says that, "This has taken place by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God." Acts chapter 2, about verse 22.

Now, at the same time, it says that, "Wicked man -- wicked men have taken and crucified him." And so we have divine foreordination and foreknowledge; and yet responsibility on the part of men for their free actions. "They are wicked men and with wicked hands they have crucified our Lord." Now I believe God has decreed all things with their causes and conditions in the order in which they will come to pass. Not a

single thing takes place that God said, "Now, wait a minute. That was out of order. That should have happened yesterday instead of today." He decrees it all.

His foreknowledge of future things and of contingent events rests upon his eternal decree. And if some of you do not remember the lecture on the decree, or were not here, go back and get the tape on it. We talked about that in some detail. That settles the problem of foreknowledge. God does have foreknowledge of the future.

Well the second problem is: Is pre-determination consistent with free will? Now I said "free will," not "free agent." Is it consistent with free will? Well now if by free will you mean arbitrariness, then the answer is "no." God's pre-destination and pre-determination is not consistent with man's free will. If one thinks a free agent's act must be uncertain by definition, then the answer is "no" again. If you think that a person, who is a free agent must, by reason of the fact, that he is a free agent, he must, in all of his actions do things that before, were uncertain.

In other words, if there can be no certainty at all about a man's actions, well then, that is inconsistent with God's pre-destination or pre-determination. If it is believed that a free agent can always act contrary to any amount of influence brought upon him, this type of free agency is contrary to pre-determination. As a matter of fact, if free acts be uncertain; they cannot be foreseen as certain under any conditions, even by God.

Now just think about that for a minute. If -- for a minute -- what you are really saying is you think that man determines his own destiny completely. If you are saying, that a man is absolutely free in his decisions, then you're saying he is arbitrary. That is, there is no certainty at all about what he will do. If you're saying really, that you believe that man is totally free -- totally free -- then even God cannot know what he is going to do.

For you see, if God knows what he's going to do, what he's going to do becomes certain. And furthermore, if God knows what he's going to do, there must be something in the man that led God to make that decision, or to know that, or by which he knows it.

That would be better. There must be something in the man by which he knows a certain action will take place. There is no such thing as “man’s free action,” in the sense of uncertain action.

Now that’s why, for example, when I talk with my friends who say, “Well Dr. Johnson, my goodness. If you believe in the pre-destination of God, how can you believe in free will?” I always say, “Well I don’t believe in free will. That’s obvious. Why, I’m standing before you as S. Lewis Johnson Jr. I wouldn’t be standing before you as S. Lewis Johnson Jr. if I had free will. I would be S. Lewis Rockefeller.” But I cannot choose my family. I cannot choose the place where I was born. I cannot choose the age in which I was born. I don’t have free will. I’m the product of my age, and of my family, and of my circumstances. Most of all, I’m a product of the working of the Holy Spirit. There is no such thing as a free action. If it were really free, God could not know it. But the Bible says he knows the future, thus, actions are certain. Now I know you’ll say, “Well Dr. Johnson, if it’s pre-determination, how -- you mean to say that man does not determine his own destiny?” No, not in that sense. But he’s responsible, the action that he does take; is his action. He does not -- he is not coerced into his decision. It’s his, just as Judas knew that his rejection of our Lord was his.

Loraine Boettner has written an excellent book on the reformed doctrine of pre-destination. He says, “Common sense tells us that no event can be foreknown unless by some means, either physical or mental, it has been pre-determined.” So in the nature of the case, if man’s will was completely free, even God couldn’t know. But he does know, and since he knows, it’s just as certain as if he had pre-determined it. And so the man who denies foreknowledge or pre-determination, must also deny foreknowledge. The certainty is the same in either case. And as I said, if it is sure to happen, then there was something about the person or the event or the thing that made God know its certainty.

I wouldn’t want to live among people who had complete free will. Do you know why? Because I couldn’t count on them at all. Complete freedom. Arbitrariness -- or

indeterminism in the philosophers' language -- is inconsistent with continuity of character. How would you like to live with people who were wholly unpredictable? Some of you I know -- you're casting around in your mind. I think I know someone like that. Not really. Not really. Oh, we do some unpredictable things, all of us. But the very fact that we are disturbed and upset when someone does things that are unpredictable shows us what kind of world we would have if everybody always did things unpredictably. That would be a terrible situation in which to live.

Elton Trueblood has said -- one of the good things he has said -- "A wholly unpredictable man would by no means, be a good man. He would indeed, be no more an ethical being than as a tossed -- than as a tossed coin. If one moment he did something good, the next moment he did something evil, if the next moment he did something wise, the next moment something foolish, if he is totally within himself, determining -- self-determined in all his actions, then he is totally unpredictable. And what he does, does not arise out of conviction, does not arise out of character, does not arise out of the inter-nature of the man. He's totally unpredictable." Man's will does not hang in the air, swinging either way by the whim of the moment, man's will is a secondary thing. Man's will is anchored in our inmost being, in our spirits, and it is there the Holy Spirit works. And, therefore, our will responds to what we are in ourselves. That's why our will responds in certain ways always.

Just to give you a simple illustration. If the Cowboys were playing Saturday, I would go to see the Cowboys. Why? Because I will to go. Yes, I will to go to see the Cowboys Saturday. Why do I will to go to see the Cowboys Saturday? Well I will to go to see the Cowboys Saturday because I like to see them play. You see my will is a secondary agent. It's not the primary reason I go. It's the secondary reason, on the basis of what I like. On the basis of what I am, I make my decisions. The will is secondary. Now that is why we are told in the Bible that we're not born of the will of man. We're born of God. That is why we are told, "It is not of him that willeth nor of him that

runneth, but of God that showeth mercy because it is God who works in our inmost spirit, by the Holy Spirit, and brings us to the place where we determine to believe in Jesus Christ." We exercise our will as the product of the working of the Holy Spirit within. Think about it a moment or two. If you'll just think about your will, you will see that that is precisely what takes place, and I'm very, very glad that it is that way.

Our Lord referred to some individuals who were "good ground," and others who were "different types of ground." "Good ground" is the person in, whose heart, the Holy Spirit has worked. They're influenced by the Holy Spirit in infallible grace and they respond to the truth. But this is not coercion. It's an influence by which, God in love, moves over the heart -- the inner man of the elect -- and brings them to faith in Christ. And the will responds spontaneously to the work of the spirit within.

Now, we have said then, that God's foreknowledge is taught in the Bible, that it is reasonable to expect in the light of the facts. We have also said man is a free agent but does not have a free will. From the human side, the individual who receives such grace, freely responds. I don't -- I was not coerced to believe in Jesus Christ. I was just wooed. Anybody who has ever courted a young lady or who has ever been courted by a young lady -- that's better -- knows exactly what I'm talking about. I think I've always thought it was the best illustration of the work of the Holy Spirit because it often comes when we are resistant, but under the charms and attractions and also, the cunning devices that women have, we in some strange and unaccountable way suddenly one day begin to like what at the first we may have resisted. But we do not say, "Oh, I'm so sorry that this has happened. It's so bad that I now am responding positively to her attraction -- or his -- as the case may be."

Now we like it. We say, "We're glad it's happened this way." It is our decision. And so finally, when we say, "Will you marry me?" Why the decision may have been made by her or by him a long time ago. "I'm going to marry that man." That's what Mary said about me, long before we were married, long before we actually became real serious.

And I think I felt the same thing about her. “I think I’m going to marry that woman.”

And it came to pass. But what happened finally was the result of other things. Well that’s what happens when the Holy Spirit works.

Now I’m going to skip the last C, the “*scientia media*” or “contingent knowledge.” Now I want to give you an assignment. Some of you who are -- want to do a little studying -- look it up in Berkoff’s Theology or Hodges’ Theology, and read up on the “*scientia media*,” because our time is up. We’ll have to stop here. Next time we’re going to pick this up. We’re going to talk about the “Wisdom of God,” and particularly, wisdom in its application to creation, the providence and to redemption, and then we’ll make the practical application of both of these doctrines, which belong together. Let’s bow in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee that the word of God very plainly states that Thou dost foreknow past, present and future. Thou dost foreknow future persons and events. And we thank Thee that this is not contradictory of the free agency of men. We thank Thee that as a result of Thy pre-determination, Thou dost know what is going to take place. And we thank Thee that men are responsible in their sin. And most of all, we thank Thee that in wonderful grace, Thou hast moved upon the hearts of some, and has wooed and won them through the message concerning Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee that we belong to Thee as a result of it. And though Lord, we may not be able to completely harmonize the foreknowledge of God and the free agency of men, we see that they are both taught in Holy Scripture, and we respond to Thee in gratitude and devotion and love our great God of infinite understanding.

Go with us as we part. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“The Knowledge and Wisdom of God, part I” by S. Lewis Johnson
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