

# God's Superior Knowledge

SERMON

By

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**June 30, 2013**

**TEXT:** 2 Peter 2:1-10

**PROP:** God's knowledge of our human condition and the trials that we face is perfect and far superior to anything we can even imagine. We can therefore pray with complete confidence in his provision for us,

## **2 Peter 1:20–21 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

## **2 Peter 2 (ESV)**

### **False Prophets and Teachers**

<sup>2</sup> But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup> And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

<sup>4</sup> For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; <sup>5</sup> if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; <sup>6</sup> if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; <sup>7</sup> and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked <sup>8</sup> (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); <sup>9</sup> then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, <sup>10</sup> and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, <sup>11</sup> whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. <sup>12</sup> But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, <sup>13</sup> suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. <sup>14</sup> They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! <sup>15</sup> Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, <sup>16</sup> but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

<sup>17</sup> These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. <sup>18</sup> For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup> They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. <sup>20</sup> For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup> For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. <sup>22</sup> What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

Peter has urged us to pay attention to the prophetic word because it comes to us from men who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The word of God is a great light shining in a dark place. Though the darkness of sin should cover the whole world and thick darkness the people of the earth the glory of the Lord has risen upon us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that enlightens God's elect wherever they are found. But Peter now tells us that false prophets and teachers arose among the people and will continue to arise among them. They will set forth cleverly devised myths designed to discredit the word of God and the Messiah of God and Peter spares nothing in his description of those who would bring destructive heresies into the church. He tells us that false teachers are blasphemers, irrational animals, blots and blemishes, insatiable for sin, accursed children, followers of the way of Balaam, waterless springs, mists driven by the storm, slaves of corruption, dogs that return to their own vomit, and pigs that return to wallowing in the mire.

In our day, replete with all sorts of media, we are confronted with a host of preachers and teachers of the Bible. How can we know which are true and which are false? Should we believe what we hear because the preacher or teacher has world renown? Is the test of authenticity a highly successful ministry in a large church or university or seminary? Perhaps we have heard the teaching of one who translated the Bible that published more than 40 million copies, namely the Living Bible. Does this commend him to us as a true teacher of the word? Perhaps the preacher is a great theologian and the author of many books. Should we therefore trust his opinions? To come to an understanding of the Bible do we play the comments of one teacher against another? Most, it would seem, do just that but for rather dubious reasons.

We may believe that because we are not trained in the original languages of the Bible we lack the competence to come to our own opinion about the meaning of a text. Many are simply too lazy to study the Bible and memorize it. We may be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of Bible data that we must deal with. However, the basis for all determination of true Bible doctrine is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. As the Westminster divines put it, "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." (Westminster Confession of Faith Ch 1, Para 10)

How can we know that the so called "Westminster Standards" are correct in the doctrines they summarize? Indeed, how can we know that any statement of faith is correct? Since our only standard of truth is the word of God we must find proof for any and all statements of faith in the Bible alone. Rome would have us look to the church for the standard of truth. False teachers would appeal to our own sense of propriety and reason to confirm what they are teaching. If it works for you it must be right for you.

Heretics according to Peter, deny the "Master who bought them". That is to say, their way of life does not comport with (their behavior is not consistent with) their claim to be redeemed by the blood of Christ. Many appeal to this statement in support of their view that Christ died for everyone in the world. They would paraphrase this verse to say that Jesus redeemed false prophets and teachers when he died on the cross. But we know that such teaching is false because the Bible clearly states, "The soul who sins shall die." It teaches that the wicked will perish in hell forever. Indeed, Peter goes on to say that, "-- *Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.*" (2 Peter 2:3, ESV)

God condemns people to hell because they are born in sin and do in fact sin, not because they refuse the gospel. The heathen sin against God and we who are parents

know very well that babies sin too. The very successful movie *Left Behind* popularizes the heresy that people who have never heard the gospel or who were too young to make a decision for Christ go to heaven when they die. In this movie such people and in particular, children were not left behind when Jesus returned secretly to rapture his church. They say that the heathen who have never heard the gospel are not lost as well as children who could not understand the gospel, because the Master bought them. But we must judge all doctrine by the clear and perfect word of God which teaches us that Christ died for the elect. Peter teaches this truth in a text we have already considered,

### **1 Peter 2:24-25**

**24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. **25** For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

We will remember that Peter addressed his epistle to the elect exiles of the dispersion therefore it was the sins of the elect that Jesus bore in his body on the tree. And we can easily show from Scripture that the whole design of redemption is particular or limited to those who he chose to be in Christ from before the foundation of the world.

Furthermore, Peter tells us that there are many other very pervasive heresies that are brought into the church. As we have seen, the lifestyles of false teachers do not comport with their claim to be bought by the Master, Jesus Christ. Judging by the heresies that rent the seven churches of Asia Minor, many are easily led into sexual immorality. Speaking of false teachers Peter writes, "*And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. --*" (2 Peter 2:2-3, ESV) They follow sensuality, meaning that they follow sexual perversion or indecent behavior of every sort. Their words are simply false, plainly contradicting what is before them in holy writ. Jesus said to the church in Pergmum, "*But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*" (Revelation 2:14-16, ESV)

False teaching in the church bears no small consequences, even as Peter goes on to say in our text. Angels who sinned were cast into hell. The world of the ungodly was destroyed in a global flood but blameless Noah and his family were saved. Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned to extinction but righteous Lot was rescued. Therefore we

learn that, "*-- the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,*" (2 Peter 2:9, ESV)

The Lord knows how to do such things but we do not. Though many of the wicked in Noah's day heard the gospel through Noah, no one but Noah and his family repented and turned to the Lord. All mankind died in the flood including those who had never heard the gospel. Surely the homosexuals in Sodom and Gomorrah witnessed the righteousness of Lot yet we read of none who repented and turned to the Lord. Had not the Lord saved Noah and Lot they would have perished along with the rest. Only the Lord knew how to save them.

There are very narrow limits to our knowledge. We boast of great knowledge and technical achievement but the things that we really know are very few. It has been said that, "He who is wisest will be the first to confess his own ignorance." In fact, our faith in the superior knowledge of God is a great source of comfort to us. The devil tempted Eve to be like God who knew both good and evil. To this point she had only known good, but how much better, Satan told her, to be like God knowing good and evil. After their sin Adam and Eve indeed knew evil but their knowledge of it was not at all like God's knowledge. Their knowledge of evil led them deeper into sin and misery as it does to us today. Furthermore it corrupted their souls, brought death to their body and soul and they became slaves to it. No so with God. The most holy God, who knows everything about evil, is life itself and the sovereign of all that is good and evil. What can be of greater comfort to us than the sovereign knowledge of God who works all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. **Our knowledge is shallow and impotent but God's knowledge is infinite and causative.** Paul tells us that God is, "*making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,*" (Ephesians 1:9-11, ESV)

We are comforted by the fact that Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials but this is only one of the many things that the Lord knows how to do. For instance we are often confronted with difficult doctrines in Scripture. We may try to reconcile God's predestination with the free will of man. Or perhaps we attempt to understand the relationship of the fact that God works all things according to the counsel of his will and prayer. How do our prayers fit into God's eternal purpose? How do they fit into his decrees? We are told to pray for things according to his will but how can we ever know the will of God? Isaiah writes, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are*

*my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."* (Isaiah 55:8-11, ESV)

We do not know the answer to the doctrinal problems but the Lord knows. We will be far happier if we leave these things to God who knows how to rescue the godly from trials.

Sometimes, we come across prophecies we do not understand. Some people claim they know all about prophecy. I certainly do not and I am quite certain that those who make such an arrogant claim do not know the answers either. But we take comfort in the fact that God knows how every prophecy will be fulfilled for God knows the future and renders it certain to happen. *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."* (Romans 8:29-30, ESV)

We may make our prophetic charts if we like, but God will follow his own chart. We may think that we have discovered the solution to the prophecies in the Revelation of John and in Daniel; but whether we have, or have not, is immaterial. John and Daniel spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, and their words will all be fulfilled in due time, and the Lord knows all there is to know about it.

The same is the case in reference to the Lord's amazing promises. As we trace the course of the covenant of grace through the pages of the Old Testament we marvel at sovereign mercies of God. The covenant proceeds through the most unlikely people in the line of the Messiah. Sarah who was barren conceived in her old age. When Abraham was instructed to kill the promised child Isaac, the covenant promise surely seemed impossible to happen. But he believed God even though he did not know how God would carry out his promise to establish his covenant with Isaac. God knows how to rescue the godly from trials. Not one good thing has God withheld from those who fear him and trust in him.

We may not understand why trials come to us but why would we even want to understand it? We walk by faith not by sight. God often gives us work to do that seems impossible to carry out. But the God who knows how to rescue the godly from their trials will provide all that is necessary to accomplish his will. We may not be able in our own

strength to do what God has given us to do. But Yahweh Yireh! Yahweh will provide! We depend entirely on God who is all-powerful to carry out his gracious promises and his will for us in what he gives us to do. A loved one lies ill or dies and we wonder how we can go on. Our business fails. We lose our home. What more can we do but cast ourselves at the feet of the God who knows how to help us. Indeed, our very faith to trust in God, to place ourselves in his all-powerful hands, is a gift from God.

Who but those whom God has caused to be born again to a living hope will ever come to him for grace. Who but those will ever trust God to deliver them. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego might well have been required to submit to a trial by ordeal well known in their day – walking over red-hot plowshares. They might have thought to be able somehow to pick their way through them and survive. But we read that Nebuchadnezzar, "*-- ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.*" (Daniel 3:20-23, ESV) There was no possibility of escape unless Yahweh himself entered the furnace with them. What faith they must have had that God would deliver them. They said, "*-- our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*" (Daniel 3:17-18, ESV) They had passed from the insignificance of human strength to the omnipotence of the Majestic Glory. God was glorified as they were seen to walk in the fire, freed from their bonds, in the company of one "like a son of the gods," as it is in the Hebrew text. Thus we learn that there is much to be gained when, in our fiery trials, we have the company of our gracious God and heavenly Father. The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials.

Have we ever been tempted to sin? Not by God we haven't, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But Satan entices us to sin against God, and lies to us about the pleasures of sin. Or it may be as James puts it, "*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*" (James 1:14, ESV) When we are tempted to sin we must fall back on the certainty that God knows how to rescue the godly from trials. Our safety is in the great Triune God of the Bible. His knowledge of our human condition and the trials that we face is perfect and far superior to anything we can even imagine. We can therefore pray with complete confidence in his provision for us, "Give us this day our daily bread." And we can pray, "Lead us not

into temptation but deliver us from evil," knowing that our gracious God will support us and deliver us, for he knows how to rescue the godly from trials.

If thou but suffer God to guide thee,  
And hope in him through all thy ways,  
He'll give thee strength, whatever betide thee,  
And bear thee through the evil days:  
Who trusts in God's unchanging love  
Builds on the rock that naught can move.

What can these anxious cares avail thee,  
These never-ceasing moans and sighs?  
What can it help, if thou bewail thee  
O'er each dark moment as it flies?  
Our cross and trials do but press  
The heavier for our bitterness.

Only be still, and wait his leisure  
In cheerful hope, with heart content  
To take whate'er thy Father's pleasure  
And all deserving love hath sent;  
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known  
To him who chose us for his own.

All are alike before the highest;  
'Tis easy to our God, we know,  
To raise thee up though low thou liest,  
To make the rich man poor and low;  
True wonders still by him are wrought  
Who setteth up and brings to naught.

Sing, pray, and keep his ways unswerving,  
So do thine own part faithfully,  
And trust his word, though undeserving,  
Thou yet shalt find it true for thee;  
God never yet forsook at need  
The soul that trusted him indeed.