**THE FUNDAMENTALS: A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH**

**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 2. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**

BY REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D.D., LL. D., MINISTER OF THE MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH, NEW YORK CITY

The man who does not know God has not begun to live. He may eat and drink, make merry, accumulate a fortune or wear a crown; but he has not entered into that better life of high hopes and noble purposes and aspirations which make us worthy of our Divine birthright. For "this is life enternal, to know God."

To put ourselves into just relations with God is literally a matter of life or death. All the ologies are worth mastering but Theology is indispensable. We must know God.

But where is He? "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! Behold, I go forward but He is not there, and backward but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand so that I cannot see Him!" The horizons recede as we approach them, and the darkness thickens as we grope like blind men feeling their way along the wall.

There are three roads which are vainly trodden by multitudes who pursue this holy quest. Each of them is marked, "This way to God"; and each of them is a cul de sac or blind alley, which leaves the soul still groping and crying, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"

**The first of these paths is Intuition.**

There are no natural atheists. All are born with an indwelling sense of God. We do not enter on conscious life like the inferior orders; but "trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home". In regions of darkest paganism there are traces of two innate convictions; namely, a Divine birth and a sinful alienation. Hence the universal spirit of unrest so pathetically expressed by Augustine: "We came forth from God, and we shall be homesick until we return to Him."

No doubt there have been some who, with no light but that which shines along the pathway of Intuition, have made the acquaintance of God; but the vast multitude have simply arrived at idolatry. They have made unto themselves gods "after the similitude of a man"; gods, like the Brocken of the Harz mountains, projected on the skies. An idol is a man-made god. It may be carved out of wood or conjured out of the gray matter of the brain; but all gods, whencesoever they come, are idols, except the one true God.

**The second pathway of the God-seekers is Reason.**

Here we come upon the philosophers and those who travel with them. This also leads to disappointment; as it is written, "The world by wisdom knew not God".

The golden age of philosophy in Greece followed close on the decay of the Pantheon. It was when the people had lost confidence in their idols and the cry was heard, "Great Pan is dead!" that the Groves and Gardens and Painted Porches arose on the banks of the Ilyssus. The thoughtful men who assumed the name philosophoi, that is, "lovers of wisdom", were all seekers after God. The Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics and Peripatetics all hoped to discover Him by the light of reason. How vain the quest!

When Simonides was asked for a definition of God, he required some weeks for meditation and then answered, "The more I think of Him, the more He is unknown!" The innumerable gods and altars of Athens had been laughed out of court; and the results of philosophic inquiry were recorded on that other altar which succeeded them, "To the Unknown God".

The stock in trade of the philosophers of Athens was precisely that of the philosophers of our time. It consisted substantially of four arguments, to wit:

(A) The ontological argument; to the effect that the being of God is involved in the idea of God. This is good as far as it goes, but it falls vastly short of demonstration; and in any case it reaches no conclusion as to the character of God.

(B) The cosmological argument, which reasons from effect to cause and expresses itself in the epigram ex nihilo nihil fit; "out of nothing nothing comes". This is equally inconclusive, since the necessary Somewhat to which it leads is but the merest shade of the shadow of a god.

(C) The teleological argument, which proceeds from design to a designer; carrying with it a strong presumption as to infinite wisdom but taking little or no cognizance of the moral nature of God.

(D) And the anthropological argument, which infers the moral nature of God from the moral nature of man. This goes further than the others; nevertheless it is so far from being final proof in the mathematical sense that one may reasonably question whether any truth-seeker was ever really convinced by it.

These are the arguments which have been used by philosophers from time immemorial; and little has been added in the process of the passing years. The result, as a whole, is melancholy failure. The world by its wisdom, that is by the exercise of its unaided reason, has simply reached Agnosticism; it has not "found out God".

Not to those who deem them themselves wise, but rather to the simple whose hearts are open Godward, comes the great revelation. It is one thing to know about God and quite another to know Him. John Hay knew all about President Lincoln from his boyhood up; little "Tad" had no such information, but he knew his father, knew him through and through. The eyes of Faith see further than those of reason. Wherefore Jesus said, "Except ye become as a little child ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of God".

**The third of the alluring pathways is that of the Five Senses;**

that is, of Natural Science, which reaches its conclusions on the evidence of the physical senses.

This rules out faith, which is the sixth sense divinely given to men for the apprehension of spiritual truths. To undertake to solve any of the great problems which have to do with our spiritual life by the testimony of the finger tips is to have one's labor for one's pains; since, in the nature of the case, "spiritual things are spiritually discerned". To undertake to grasp a spiritual fact by the physical senses is as preposterous as it would be to insist on seeing with the ears or hearing with the eyes. Faith is not credulity, nor is it unsubstantial, nor is it believing without evidence. On the contrary, it is both substantial and evidential: only it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". To refuse to exercise this sixth sense or power of spiritual apprehension is to shut oneself out forever from the possibility of apprehending God or any of the great, intangible, but real truths which center in Him.

Yet we are constantly hearing, in certain quarters, of the importance of pursuing our theological studies "by the scientific method". With what result? "We have a world of facts", they say, "and from these facts, by the inductive process, we must arrive at our conclusions". It is like an example in Algebra: God is the unknown term; let this be expressed by "x": the problem then is to resolve "x" into known terms by the use of a multitude of seen and tangible facts. Can it be done? Go on and pursue your researches along the lines of evolution, until back of cosmos you come to chaos, and back of chaos to the nebula, and back of the nebula to the primordial germ; and that last infinitesimal atom will look up at you with the old question on its lips, as loud as ever and involving a problem as deep as when you began, "Whence came I?" What is your answer? God? Call it "God" if you please; in fact, however, it is simply an impersonal indefinable, inescapable something or other which, for lack of a better term, is designated as a "First Cause", but which is infinitely far from what is meant by a personal God.

Well, then, shall the quest be given up? Is the universal thought of God merely an ignis fatuus leading the hopeful traveller into a realm of impenetrable mists and shadows? Or is there still some way of finding out God?

**Yes, there is a fourth road by which we approach Him; and it is an highway cast up by the King Himself. It is called "Revelation", or the Unveiling.**

There is an antecedent presumption in its favor; to wit, that if there is a God anywhere in the universe He would not leave us to grope our way hopelessly in the dark toward Him, but would somewhere, somehow, unveil Himself to us.

Well, here is a Book, which claims to be Revelation. Of all the books in the literature of the ages it is the only one that claims to have been divinely authorized and "written by holy men as they were moved by the Spirit of God".

It opens with the words, "In the beginning, God"; and proceeds to set forth the two great doctrines of Creation and Providence. It affirms, on the one hand, that everything in the universe has its origin in the creative power of God; and, on the other, that everything is sustained by the providence of God.

In these two doctrines we have the sum and substance of Bible truth. But this is not all. In between the doctrines of Creation and Providence there walks, through all the corridors of Holy Writ, a mysterious Figure who is the foregleam of another revelation further on. At the outset this Figure appears in the protevangel as the "Seed of Woman", who is to come in the fullness of time to "bruise the serpent's head". And He appears and re-appears, now in kingly guise, again as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and again with a name written on His vesture, "Emmanuel", which being interpreted is "God with us".

This Book, claiming to be the written Word of God, makes us acquainted with His being, personality and moral attributes; but it does not exhaust the theme. It leads us along a road, lighted by visions and prophecies, until it opens into another and clearer road; to wit, "The Incarnate Word of God".

**And this fifth road, the Incarnation, is the way which all truth-seekers must pursue if they would finally arrive at a just and saving knowledge of God.**

It is here that we meet Christ, bringing the message from the throne. He comes into our world with the express purpose of making God known to us; as it is written, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him".

He is called the Word, because He is the medium of communication between the Infinite and the finite; as it is written, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us": that is to say, the Incarnation is the articulation of the speech of God.

In the Scriptures we have a letter from God; but in the Incarnation, we have the coming down of God to unveil Himself before us.

The soul of sinful man is like a child lost among strangers, wild-eyed, lips trembling, eyes searching vainly for a familiar face. Ah, here the mother comes! And the child is sobbing out its happiness on her breast. "Cuddle doon, my bairnie!" So is it when the sinner finds Christ; or shall we not rather say, when Christ, the seeking God, finds him?

If, then, we are ever to learn theology it must be as disciples, sitting in a docile attitude at the feet of Christ. He, as the incarnate Son, is our authoritative Teacher. What, therefore, has He to say about God?

As to His being, He has little or nothing to say; for the obvious reason that God's being is the substratum of Christ's entire doctrine, without which it would be as insignificant as a painted ship upon a painted ocean. Moreover, all His teaching is postulated on the written Word, of which He said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me." And the moment we turn from the Incarnate Word to the written Word, we come upon the saying, "In the beginning, God".

As to the moral attributes of God, the teaching of Jesus is indubitably clear. "God is a spirit", He says, "and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth". It need scarcely be said that a spirit, though invisible and impalpable, is a real self-conscious personality. The communion of Jesus with this Spirit is that of one person with another. He does not speak to Law, not to Energy, nor to an indefinable "Something not ourselves that maketh for righteousness", but to One with whom He is on familiar terms. "The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him".

As to Divine providence He speaks in no uncertain tone. The God whom He unveils is in and over all. Out on the hillsides He bids us "Consider the lilies, how they grow", and assures us that our Father, "who careth for them, will much more care for us". In pursuance of this fact He encourages us to pray, saying, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you". Oh, great heart of the Infinite, quick to respond to our every cry for help! The doctrine of prayer, as taught by Jesus, is simplicity itself. We are to run to God with our longings as children to their parents; "For if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him".

As to the moral attributes of God the teaching of Jesus is not only clear but most emphatic; because at this point it touches vitally our eternal welfare. The Divine holiness is presented not so much as an attribute as the condition of God's being. It is the light emanating from His throne, of which Christ is the supreme manifestation, as He said, "I am the light of the world"; and this light must ever be reflected in the life of His disciples, as He said, "Ye are the light of the world; let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify God". This holiness is not merely freedom from moral contamination; but such a sensitive aversion to sin as makes it impossible for God to look with complacency upon any creature who is defiled by it. Hence the appeal to the cultivation of a holy life; since "without holiness no man shall see God".

Out of this atmosphere of holiness proceed two attributes which, like opening arms, embrace the world. One of them is Justice, or regard for law. No teacher ever lived, not even Moses, who emphasized as deeply as did Jesus the integrity of the moral law. He defended not only the law itself but the penalties affixed to its violation. The Decalogue is not so severe an arraignment of sin as the Sermon on the Mount, which rings with the inviolability of law.

The other of the outstretched arms is Love. The fullness of Divine love is set forth in the words of Jesus: "When ye pray say, 'Our Father' ". It was wisely observed by Madame de Stael that if Jesus had never done anything in the world except to teach us "Our Father" He would have conferred an inestimable boon upon all the children of men. God's love is manifest in the unceasing gifts of His providence; but its crowning token is the grace of salvation: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life".

And the reconciliation between Love and Justice is found at the Cross. Here "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other". As law is sacred and inviolable, its penalty must be inflicted; it must be inflicted either upon the malefactor or upon some competent substitute who shall volunteer to suffer for him. It is the only begotten Son who volunteers, saying, "Here am I, send Me!" The justice of God is shown in the suffering inflicted upon His only begotten Son; and His love is correspondingly shown in the proffer of all the benefits of that vicarious suffering to everyone on the sole condition of faith.

It pleased God to vindicate His supreme majesty before His ancient people in the controversy on Carmel. All day the pagan priests assembled at their altar cried, "O Baal, hear us": but there was no voice nor any that regarded. At evening the lone prophet of Jehovah stood beside his altar and calmly made his prayer, "O God of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God!" Was there any that regarded? Lo, yonder in the twilight sky a falling fleece of fire! In awe-struck silence the people saw it descending, lower and lower, until it touched the sacrifice and consumed it. The logic of the argument was irresistible: they cried with one accord, "Jehovah is the God!"

The antitype and parallel of that great controversy is at Calvary, where Christ, at once the ministering priest and the sacrifice upon the altar, made His last prayer with hands outstretched upon the cross; and the descending fire consumed Him as a whole burnt offering for the world's sin. The logic, here also, is unanswerable. In all the world there is no other gospel which adequately sets forth the Divine love. By the power of truth, by the triumph of righteousness, by the logic of events, by the philosophy of history, by the blood of the atonement, let the world answer, "Our God is the God of salvation; and there is none other beside Him!"

The failure of other religions and philosophies has been grotesquely pathetic. The irony of Elijah on Carmel is merely an echo of the Divine burst of laughter out of heaven in response to those who cry: "Let us break His band asunder and cast away His cords from us!" He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. The pantheons crumble and the priests die; one altar remains, to wit, the cross on Calvary. It is the sole altar and supreme argument of the true God.

But every man must for himself make answer to that argument. Each for himself, must fight his way into the truth. It is like the grapple which Jacob had with an unseen antagonist at the brookside. As the night wore on he came to understand that Omnipotence had laid hold upon him. Then came a sudden wrench, and Jacob fell, disabled. God had thrown him! He sank a helpless man, but, clinging still, cried, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me!" And thereupon the blessing was given, a blessing which God had waited through the weary years to bestow upon him: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, 'the Supplanter', but Israel; for as a prince hast thou prevailed with God", Then and there he received his guerdon of knighthood and entered into the higher life. At the close of that conflict the light of morning was glowing on the hills of Edom: how significant the words, "And the sun arose upon him!"

The new life had begun: the long quest was over; Jacob had found God. And he went his way limping on his shrunken thigh, to bear through all the after years the token of that struggle until he came to heaven's gate, at peace with God.

It is thus that every man finds God; in a close grapple that ends in self surrender, an utter yielding to the beneficent power of God.

So true life begins with knowing God. It begins when a man, oppressed by doubt and uncertainty, hears His voice saying, "Reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side!" It begins when, standing under the cross, he realizes, as Luther did, "He died for me, for me!" Then the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Love conquers doubt, and the soul, beholding the unveiling of the Infinite in the passion of Christ, cries out, "My Lord and My God!"