

## Chapter 1 – Concerning the Knowledge of God

### Q1. Whence do we know that there is a God?

A. From nature, and from the Holy Scriptures.

The question is about the place from where a person gets the knowledge of God from. However, there are a number of assumptions made. What are these assumptions?

In the first place, *there is a God*. It is clear that this is necessary. If there is no God, there would be no need for any religion. Also, if God would not exist, it would be unnecessary to look for salvation or to obtain it. The New Testament makes clear that we need to know that God exist, before we could come in prayer before the LORD. We read in Hebrews, “He that cometh to God must believe that He is [=exist]...” (Hebr. 11:6). The question to you and me is, do we believe that God exists? How is this visible in our lives? Today, the existence of God is much questioned. The evolution theory says that there is no God. We can say that this view has problems. Let us first think about what the evolution theory is, before we enter into its issues. What is the evolution theory? Indeed, the belief that there is no God. At the beginning of time, there was a great explosion, called the big bang. This caused to form the universe. Little by little planets were formed. One day there came life on earth. Very small and simple cells. This developed more to fishes, which transformed into reptiles and birds. Then the land animals were formed out of these preceding animals. At last, man came forth from the ape. What are things in the evolution theory that are problematic? Yes, there are a couple of things to mention. One is the beginning of life. Scientists have not been able to get life from something that is not alive. This is certainly problematic. How did all that life come into existence from only physical dead material? This is a question that scientists cannot answer. A second challenge is the beginning of the universe. Without any cause the ‘big bang’ suddenly happened. But we can say from all of life, everything that happens has a certain cause. This is also true for the beginning of the universe. If there was an explosion, what or who caused the explosion? Scientists leave us in the dark. A third problem that can be pointed out is the missing links. That means a link between one type of animal and another, for example a half-fish-bird. Evolutionists say that man came from the ape. But where is the living being that should be the link between them? This is still not found. And from the Bible we can say, this being will never be found because it never existed. Let us now look at the second assumption of the question.

The next assumption is that *human beings have the capacity to know things*. The question says “whence do we know.” There is no doubt whether one can know things. No, this is simply assumed. Note that it does say “we” and not “all creatures.” We believe that human beings differ from animals. They do not have the capacity to know things in the way we do. Animals cannot think logically about God’s existence. For example, one day you pass by one of your cows. You think, it would be nice to tell him one of the great histories of the Bible. So, you tell him the story of Joseph in prison. The cow seems to listen carefully to you. But would he really understand? Would he be able to tell it back to you? No, of course not. That is foolishness to think. He has not the capacity to reason.

In the third place, the question makes clear that *God has revealed himself*. What if God existed but had not made himself know. How would this be a problem? Think also about this question, what

would be good ways to make yourself known to another person? It is good to give another example. There is a new president installed in the United States. But he lives in the basement of his house. He never comes into the public. He does not reveal himself in any media. How would we know that there would be a new president? We would not. This shows that the question is right. If God exists, He also revealed Himself.

The last assumption is that there is a *place or source where we can obtain knowledge of God*. What would it be if there would be revelation but no source to get it, how would someone profit from it? That would not be the case. For example, the United States has certain laws. These laws are revealed in the past to the public. Currently, there is no place where these laws can be found. How would I know the laws of the United States? I would not. That they are revealed is not enough. I also need to have a place where to find this information. The same is true with the revelation of God. It must be found in certain sources. What are these sources?

In the answer, there are two sources mentioned by which God revealed Himself: 1. Nature. 2. Scripture. They have both a different purpose. The first source, nature, has the purpose that people know *that* God exists. Certain characteristics of God are visible in nature, for example the design element in nature shows that He has a mind. The second source, Scripture, shows *who* God is. This knowledge can be known by the mind and by the heart. The last one is necessary for salvation. This is what we call experimental knowledge. The experience that God exist.

## **Q2. How is God known Of how many kinds is the knowledge of God from nature?<sup>1</sup>**

A. In two ways: (1) an internal, or innate (2) an external or acquired knowledge.

This question speaks about the knowledge of God that comes from nature. It is the first type of knowledge that we found in the previous answer. Let us first think about this, what is knowledge? Dictionaries give different answers. Simply said, knowledge is information that is stored in a person's mind. Do animals have knowledge? Yes, to a certain extent this is the case, but it differs from knowledge that humans have.

In the answer on the question, we find two types of knowledge: internal and external knowledge. It is seen from the perspective (view) of man. On the one hand knowledge on the inside, on the other hand that what comes from the outside. The first one is also called "innate" knowledge. That means, something that one has from birth. It is internal. Someone is born with it. The assumption here is that everyone has this knowledge. For example, every baby has a voice. At certain moments, he will cry out loud when it has pain or need food. Other times, it feels that the mother is close. Did his mother have to teach this? No. It was as it were programmed in the baby. In the next question, we will go deeper into this matter. The other type of knowledge is "acquired." This means that someone obtains or gets knowledge from elsewhere. It is not ingrained in the person. For example, a baby has the ability to speak. The capacity is given from birth. However, parents have to teach the child the sounds, words and a whole language. The existence of external knowledge assumes three different things. First, not everyone has this knowledge. Some do have it, others may not. Second, a person can increase this knowledge by research. This includes the knowledge about God. Third, one needs a specific external source to obtain this knowledge. It is not found in the person itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally: Lit: Of how many kinds is the knowledge of God from nature? A. Of two kinds...

**Q3. What is the internal or innate knowledge?**

A. It is the knowledge of God which is naturally in the hearts of all men from birth.<sup>2</sup> “Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them” (Rom. 1:19).

What does “innate” or “internal” mean? In simple terms, it is something that is “by nature.” The Oxford Dictionary defines it as follows, “The basic or inherent features of something, especially when seen as characteristic of it,” and the Collins dictionary says, “As a result of inborn or inherent qualities; innately.” In other words, it is something inside man. It is part of his essence or being. He is unable to change that. For example, why is it that humans eat food and not grass? Maybe there are few exceptions, but that would be very unnatural. Why do we love certain foods and other not? We are born with it. So, innate knowledge means that it is inborn in a person's heart by nature.

A question that arises is, what is the heart? Different theologians give a variety of answers. For example, Rev. Kersten says, “The most inner of your being, with your heart, out of which are the outgoings of life and not only in the external appearance.” Another theologian, Jamieson, says, “The ‘heart,’ must here mean the sincerity of both the thoughts and the feelings.” In other words, it is someone’s true self, the most inner part of a human. Notice that the answer speaks of the hearts of “all men.” That includes everyone in the church, each person in the world. It is both those that call themselves atheists as well as those that follow other religions. That is why there are so many religions in this world. No one is excluded. You could ask, where do we find this in the Bible? That is a very good question. In Romans 1, we find a reference, where it says, “Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them” (Rom. 1:19). The annotations on the Bible write, “Namely so much as a man without God’s Word can know out of nature...This is within their minds” (SV-KT44-45), and “By the law of nature, in their conscience.” In other words, this knowledge is available for everyone and even in the conscience of a person. What does this practically mean? That the conscience of a person speaks. When? Think about the example when a child does something wrong. What happens? First, he will hear a voice inside that tells him: What you do is wrong. Second, when mother comes, he will feel that he has done wrong. He wants to hide from mother. Why is that? It is because his conscience speaks. So, we can say that each person in the world has certain knowledge of God. This is knowledge that he is born with. It is specifically revealed when he does something against God’s law. Then his conscience begins to speak.

**Q4. How can we say that there is innate knowledge, seeing there are fools, who say in their hearts that there is no God (Ps. 14:1)?**

A. That is more a desire than actual belief that there is no God.

The previous questions were about the existence of God. But a number of people in the world reject any existence of God. The question refers to them as fools. But what are “fools”? One dictionary says, it is “a person lacking in judgment or prudence.” Another commentary defines it as one who is a “senseless fellow, [or] dullard.” Is that what is meant here? No. According to the Bible a fool is “someone who disregards God’s Word.” His heart turns to foolishness. He has evil plans. He does not learn his lesson from mistakes he has made. This fool does not like spiritual knowledge and understanding. He even hates discipline. Do you know what he likes? Wickedness and evil.

<sup>2</sup> Literally the answer says, “That which is inborn in the hearts of all men by nature.”

It is good to think about the following question, *what is atheism*? If we look it up, it is defined as “The belief that there is no God...or greatest being.” How would you answer someone that would say to you, “I do not believe God exists”? That can be a challenge. Why? Because the Bible differs in what it says from the belief of an atheist. Because what does the Bible say? In Romans, we read, “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them” (Rom. 1:19). What then is revealed to them? God’s wrath. Verse 20 adds that God’s invisibility is seen in creation by every human being. This means that no one has an excuse to believe God does not exist. But what does the atheist say? “God does not exist.” How can we reconcile these two statements? Let’s think about it a bit more. Because do you know what is interesting? Why do so many atheists fight against religion? Why do they want to force others to believe that God does not exist? Why do a number of atheists dread God’s existence at their deathbed? One example is Francis Newport. He was the head of the English Atheists. At his deathbed, he said, “You need not tell me there is no God, for I know there is one, and that I am in His presence! You need not tell me there is no hell. I feel myself already slipping.”<sup>3</sup> Let us give another example. A well known atheist is Richard Dawkins. He wrote *The God Delusion*. But what does he say about morality? Morality is rules to live outwardly according to God’s law. He says, “If religion will be abolished, people are right to do bad things. There is no God watching them.” Then he refers to a test with a security camera in a shop. When cameras are used, shoplifting will decline. And he says that the same is true about God. God as it were is a divine ‘spy camera’ that reads every thought. Thus, if people realize that God exists, they will do less evil. Very interesting. Let us look at another area. How would this man look to the design we see in the universe? He says in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*, “Biology is the study of complicated things that *give the appearance* of having been designed for a purpose.” Is that not interesting? There is at least the appearance that a Designer exists. One time, a person asked Dawkins about this. He said, “What do you think is the possibility that Intelligent Design might turn out to be the answer to some issues in genetics, or evolution?” Do you know Dawkins’ answer? “It could be that at some earlier time, somewhere in the universe, a civilization evolved by probably some kind of Darwinian means to a very, very high level of technology— and designed a form of life that they seeded onto perhaps this planet...And I suppose it’s possible that *you might find evidence* for that if you look at the details of biochemistry, molecular biology, you *might find a signature of some sort of designer*.” Is that not interesting? He acknowledges that there is some proof of a Designer. Of course, he directly adds that this “designer” is not anything like the God of the Bible. In summary, we can say that Dawkins sees the possibility for the evidence of a Designer, a Creator of the universe. Stein asked him also what he would ask if he had to appear before God, if it would be the case that God would exist. Do you know what Dawkins would say? “Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?” What can we learn from this? That strong atheists are not sure God does not exist. This is exactly what we find in the answer of our catechism booklet.

What does our answer say? It is more a “desire” or wish than an actual believe. Why would it be their wish? Atheists want to walk unlimited in sin. But each person has a conscience. What is that? It is an inner voice that warns when we do wrong. Let’s say that you have beaten a stranger. After that moment, you wish that the police does not exist. Or at least that they will not find out. Why? It

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3 <https://christian-faith.com/quotes-of-dying-atheists-and-god-haters/>

would bring you in trouble. Let's finish our catechism question with another question, what arguments would you give to an atheist to prove that God exists? Think about some arguments.

**Q5. What is external or acquired knowledge?**

A. It is the knowledge of God that can be derived from the visible creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work." (Ps. 19:1).

Remember that we speak about external knowledge. That is knowledge that we get from the outside. It is acquired, which means to obtain it. Note that it speaks of getting knowledge of God. Also, it is a another type of knowledge, knowledge that we do not have by birth. It is what we get by an external source. This knowledge is "derived." It is what we get. We do get this knowledge by our five senses. What five senses do we have?

1. Seeing (eyes), 2. Hearing (ears),
3. Touch (fingers),
4. Smell (nose), 5. Taste (mouth)

Let us focus on the first two. This is in line with our question, what we get "from the visible creation." How do we see around us that God exists? We can mention two things, first creation is designed. It is clear that a designer has made all things in creation. Many things are functional. It is orderly. There are different colors. There is a circulation of oxygen to carbon-dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). It is fascinating to see way how a baby is formed in the womb. Second, we see maintenance. Think about the growth of wheat and corn every year. That is what we can see. Let's now turn to the second sense. How can we hear in creation that God exists? This is in a number of things, for example, thunderstorms, singing birds, and mowing cows. It is summarized in one of the psalms, "The heavens declare God's glory" (Ps. 19:1). This is all about our senses. But we also have a soul. This is more related to God than our bodies. What is a soul? It is a spiritual being. A being with a will, knowledge, and reason. The soul cannot die though the body can. Why is the soul then more related to God than the body? God is a Spirit. Our soul, as it were, is in the same realm. But the problem with our soul is that it is darkened. Yes, it is true that some sparks of light are left (Canons of Dort), but generally, it is much darkened.

**Q6. How can we conclude from creation that there must be a God?**

A. Because creation cannot exist nor continue to be of themselves, but must necessarily have been created, and still sustained by God, "Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" (Job 12:9).

The question begins with "how." What is the way by which someone must conclude that God exists. It means, someone has the possibility to come to the conclusion that God exists. What kind of conclusion do we speak about? This begins with seeing and observing. Then the person thinks about it. The logical conclusion in his soul must be "there is a god." Let's give an example. You come to a certain location where you find an old house. It is in decay. There are holes in the roof. Stones are broken. The garden is full of weeds. The pain on the house is peeling off. Two weeks later, you come back to this house. Now, it looks completely new. The holes are closed. Stones are repaired. The garden does no longer have weeds. The paint is new and refreshing. What is your conclusion? People have worked on it. One thought about it and others worked it out. By the evidence of

change, we can conclude that people have worked on it. What other examples would you give to describe the process of seeing, reasoning and come to conclusion?

What is the conclusion in of our catechism booklet? “Creation cannot exist nor continue [of itself].” This existence has to do with the doctrine of creation. Everything has a beginning. This must have happened by a Creator, God. Also, it is continued or sustained. That points to God’s providence. God maintains what He has created. This is also about restraining sinful things, like killings or riots. Let us think about the following question, why can human beings not exist without God? What do they depend on? You can point to food and drink, rain and sunshine, and sickness and health. There are many more things that we can mention. So, we need Someone else to sustain us. But there are people that have different thoughts about it. They believe in “deistic evolution.” This is a belief that God has created all things. But He no longer needs to maintain it. They have the idea of creation like winding up a clock. After that, the clock keeps working on its own. You no longer have to look after it. But is this be true? No. Even for that clock, it needs to be wind up every time again. This is also true in other areas. Farmers know of such things. Think about a wheat harvest. You need to plant the seeds. Compare that with creation. But after that moment, you need to maintain it continually. It needs water. You need to take out the weeds. Other times you need to spray pesticides. That is a picture of God’s sustaining power or providence. Let's end with this question, when do we see most that we depend on God? Yes, in times of trouble, sickness, and floods.

#### **Q7. Is the knowledge of God from nature sufficient for salvation?**

A. No.

Let us first look at the phrase “the knowledge of God from nature.” What is the difference between knowledge of God that we get from creation and from the Bible? Creation shows that there is a God. He is powerful. He has a mind. He has the authority and a law. He does good. Nature is a proof of God’s existence. It is a basis to seek the true God and to know more about Him. But what are some things we cannot know about God from nature? That He exists in three persons. That He knows all things. What are some things we need to know that creation does not tell us? We can think of the creation of man. The origin of sin. The time after death. The way to live according to God’s law. But the Bible shows that God is triune. That means one God exists in three persons. It shows the person and work of Jesus Christ. It reveals the way of salvation and the covenants. Maybe it is hard to grasp what the trinity is. Three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one God. Let us try to explain the trinity by an example. Many companies have a management team. These men rule the company. We can say that the management team exists of *multiple persons*. At the same time, we will only speak of *one* management team. Not two or three. No, only one. At the same time, the men that are part of this team are different persons. This is a very incomplete example of the trinity.

Our question asks if the knowledge of God from nature is sufficient. What does the word “sufficient” mean? Simply said it means “enough.” No, it is not all the knowledge that a person can gain. It is true that it can depend on the situation. Think for a moment about marriage. Let’s say that you have a large debt. You know of another party that is rich. If you can marry that other person, you will be rich. The only problem is that you have no way to communicate to the other person. Would you be able to marry that person? Would you be able to decrease your debt? No. There is no

way to come closer to one another. Well, that is what we speak about. Nature gives some knowledge of God. But is that knowledge enough? Then the question arises, enough for what? Our catechism speaks of the knowledge for salvation. But what is salvation actually? In another place, Hellenbroek says, “To deliver from the greatest evil [sin] and to bring to the highest good [grace].” Let’s say that your car gets stuck on the highway. The weather is very cold. It is freezing. The temperature around 10 degrees. You get stuck at this highway by night. If nothing changes, you will freeze to death. The only way to save you out of this situation is to contact your brother. You call him. He picks you up. Now you are “saved” from this difficult situation. You are brought to a safe place. In our question, it is about the sufficiency of the knowledge of God from nature. Is that enough to save a person from eternal judgment? The answer is, no. That means, a person can know God exists but not know how to get right with God. He will know in the great day that he did wrong, but not how it could have been solved. The question that then arises is, why this is impossible.

### **Q8. Why not?**

**A. Christ cannot be known by this knowledge.**

The answer begins with “Christ.” It is good to think about that name for a moment. Who is Christ? Yes, when He was born He received the name Jesus. The name Jesus means “to save from sins.” But what does the title Christ stand for? Literally it is “anointed.” What then was He anointed to? Three offices. Prophet, priest, and king. Think what happened with the anointing of king David. What did he receive by his anointing? First, authority; second, the gifts to do this office. The same for Christ. He received by His anointing the authority for His work. He also received the gift of the Holy Spirit for executing His work.

What does the answer in our booklet say about Christ? He “cannot be known by this knowledge.” That means, Christ cannot be known by the knowledge of God found in nature. Yes, one can know that there is a God who must be worshiped. But how must that be done? Think about the following. Your neighbor asks you to do his garden, but he does not tell you how. What can the result be? Yes, strong disagreement about the results. Maybe you think that you did a good job, but your neighbor believes that you ruined his garden. The same is true when we think of God. A person can know some things about God from nature. But it is not revealed how God needs to be worshiped. The thought of the human can be so different what God expects. Let’s give another example. You have a debt on your house for a year. If you do not pay next month, you will be cast out of your house. You know that you need to pay to a certain person or company. But you are not sure where to go. You are unable to find any information on the internet. Asking around does not help either. What will happen? Yes, you will finally have to leave the house. Why? You did not pay. The same is true for the way of salvation. Without the Bible, it is impossible to know more about Christ for salvation. We read in Ephesians, “[Paul] should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:8-9). Thus, the answer of our booklet makes clear that the knowledge of nature is not enough. But why? That is what we find in our next question.

**Q9. Is the knowledge of Christ necessary for salvation?**

Yes. For there is written, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, *and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*” (John 17:3).

The question is about the knowledge of Christ and salvation. Does someone need to have this knowledge? That is why the question asks, “is the knowledge Christ necessary for salvation?” The original actually says, is it absolutely necessary? Let us think a bit more about this question. What knowledge does someone need for salvation? We can point to two things. First, the knowledge of Christ’s death on the cross. This is the payment for sin. Second, the application of Christ’s payment to the elect. But why is this knowledge necessary? Why can it not happen in any other way? We can point to three different things. First, Christ is the only way to the Father. Second, He is the only payment for sin. Notice that God does not ignore His righteousness. No, God is angry because of sin. That anger needs to be appeased. Third, Christ is the only One that kept the law fully. Therefore, Scripture says, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim. 2:5). A mediator is someone that solves an issue between two parties that are at enmity with one other. Let’s think about this. What would happen if one would only know about the Father or the Holy Spirit? First, God the Father is angry. It would consume the sinner like a fire when he is outside Christ (Hebr. 12:9). That would be the same as trying to fly to the sun without shield to protect you. What will then happen? You will be burned completely. Second, the Holy Spirit ‘depends’ on the Father and the Son for His work. He does not point to Himself but to Christ. You can think of this example. Next to the highway is a sign to Washington, DC. But what if Washington does not exist? What function does the sign have? It is useless. You need both, Washington and the road-sign to show the way to it. The same is true for the Spirit. His work is without value if Christ would not exist. Therefore, it is necessary to have knowledge of Christ. What is then the way to obtain knowledge about Christ? That is our next question.

**Q10. How must this saving knowledge be acquired?**

A. From the Holy Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:19)

Our question begins with “how.” Literally it says, “from where.” So, the question looks at the source where this knowledge can be obtained. It is necessary to have the right source for the right solution. Let’s say that you need to sow your field with wheat seeds. You go to the hardware store for seeds. Will you find seeds there? You went indeed to the store, but it is the wrong one. That means you will have no seeds for sowing. You will never get a harvest. Why? You went to the wrong place. You looked at the wrong source. In our question the right source is the Scriptures. This can be both the written version, the Bible, and the audible version, preaching. Remember that not everyone in the time of the Bible could read. Not each person had access to the scrolls. But they could listen to the preaching of the Word of God.

Another important point our questions makes is that it speaks about “saving knowledge.” It is the knowledge that someone needs for restoration. It is not just knowledge. Let’s say that you need seeds for sowing. This time you go to the farmers market. But you buy pumpkin seed. You sow and wait. What is the result? Will it be a wheat harvest? No! You will see pumpkins grow. Why do you not get a wheat harvest? You bought indeed seeds, but they were not the right ones. The same is true for knowledge. We need to have the right knowledge for salvation. Our question speaks



therefore about “saving knowledge.” This is the knowledge a person needs for salvation. He needs to acquire it. That means to obtain or to get. But from where?

The answer says, “From the Holy Scriptures.” Later we will go more in depth about the Scriptures. But what is another word for Scriptures? Yes, the Bible, the Old and New Testament. But why does our answer speak about “holy”? Think about this, the *Holy Spirit* moved the minds of the writers of the Bible books. He took care that they would not make any mistakes. Let’s give an example. You want to make a wooden cabinet. You get the whole package from IKEA. You follow the instruction manual. After few hours of work, the cabinet is build. If others ask you what cabinet it is, you say, “It is an IKEA cabinet.” Why? They did not build it for you. Why would you call it with that name? Simply because they gave the blueprint. They gave the material, drawings, and instructions. Keep that in mind when we speak about the Holy Scriptures. They were given by a Holy God.

Let us think about another question, why does it say “Scriptures,” in the plural, and not simply Scripture, singular? Another word for Scriptures is the Bible. That comes from the Greek “biblia.” The meaning of that word is “books.” What is the Bible actually? On the one hand it is one book. On the other hand is it a collection of different books. There are 66 books in total. Think about Genesis through Revelation. Also, the Bible is written by different human authors, who were all guided by one Holy Spirit. These books together form the Bible or the Scriptures. What does that mean practically? That we have no other inspired Bible writings outside these 66 books. Thus, the knowledge that is needed for salvation does not come from extra ‘bible’ books. Such books are called apographe. It also means that other books, even good books, are not necessary for salvation. It is true that God can use them, but then such books simply express the same information that is found in the Bible. Another consequence is that no scriptures of other religions are the basis for salvation. Think about the writings of the Islam and Mormons. Their writings are not foundational for true salvation. No, the Bible is the only source to get knowledge for salvation. This can be in the written version, a printed Bible. It can also be the audible version, the preaching. We can say that the Bible is infallible. That means without error and sure. It contains perfect knowledge. Knowledge necessary for salvation.