

# Glorying in the Knowledge of God

*Text: Jeremiah 9:23–24; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 34*

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Jeremiah 9 opens with a lament—a cry of anguish from the prophet over the sins of his people: “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears” (Jer. 9:1). The lament is not over minor transgressions but over the *wholesale corruption* of Israel: “They are not valiant for the truth upon the earth... they know not me, saith the LORD” (v. 3). Truth had perished from the land; deceit, lies, treachery, and idolatry were rampant. Israel had forsaken the law of the Lord (v. 13) and had walked after the imagination of their own hearts and after Baalim.

In this context, Jeremiah proclaims the word of the Lord: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me” (Jer. 9:23–24). These words strike at the root of all human pride and point us to the only true foundation of life: the knowledge of God.

This same truth is articulated in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 34, as it expounds the first commandment. The law of God demands that we avoid idolatry, flee from superstition, and learn rightly to know the only true God—loving, fearing, and trusting Him above all. At its heart, the first commandment calls us to glory in God alone.

This chapter unfolds under two headings: *what we must not do* and *what we must do*.

## What We Must Not Do

Jeremiah's denunciation begins with three figures—each representing a form of carnal confidence: the wise man, the mighty man, and the rich man (Jer. 9:23). These men embody the false refuges of the unconverted heart.

*The Wise Man.* This is not a man with divine wisdom but one wise in the eyes of the world—like “Mr. Worldly Wiseman” in *Pilgrim's Progress*. He may be intellectually accomplished and full of plans, but he lacks the fear of the Lord, which fear is “the beginning” of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). He trusts that his

knowledge or cleverness will deliver him from trouble. He scoffs at divine warnings and boasts in his own reason. “I’m too clever to be damned,” he thinks. But this is a boast in self.

*The Mighty Man.* Here is the soldier or political leader – brave, strategic, strong. He trusts in human power. Jerusalem’s walls, its defenders, its weapons – he thinks these will stand against Babylon. But no amount of human strength can resist the decrees of God. As Psalm 33:16 reminds us, “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.”

*The Rich Man.* He is secure in his wealth. “Money will shield me,” he thinks. He can buy food, medicine, soldiers, and advice. But riches profit not in the day of wrath (Prov. 11:4). The Babylonian sword will cut through his moneybags as if they were paper.

The Lord forbids boasting in these things: Firstly, because they are all from Him anyway. “What hast thou that thou didst not *receive*?” (I Cor. 4:7). Our intellect, strength, and wealth are divine *gifts* – not grounds for pride. Secondly, they are utterly ineffectual to deliver from divine judgment. Human wisdom cannot outwit omniscience. Human strength cannot overcome omnipotence. Human wealth cannot bribe divine justice. “Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Ps. 127:1).

And yet, in Jeremiah’s day – and ours – men continued to boast. Their boast was ultimately in self: self-wisdom, self-sufficiency, self-salvation. But this, says the *Heidelberg Catechism*, is idolatry. “What is idolatry?” Answer: It is, “instead of or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust” (Q&A. 95). Boasting in self is the very definition of idolatry.

The judgment that fell on Jerusalem was a judgment against that idolatrous pride. The Lord reduced the city to heaps and made it a “den of dragons” (Jer. 9:11). The people who would not know Him were cast into Babylon. And He called for wailing women to teach their daughters to mourn (v. 20), for death had entered every household.

## **What We Must Do**

“But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me” (Jer. 9:24). This is the divine alternative to idolatrous boasting: glory in the knowledge of God.

To know God is not merely to know *about* Him. It is not mere information or abstract theology. It is *personal, covenantal, saving* knowledge. Jesus says in John 17:3, "This is life eternal, that they might *know thee* the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." This knowledge is *spiritual and relational*, involving heart and soul, mind and strength.

God reveals Himself in names and attributes: "I am the LORD" – Jehovah, the I AM (Ex. 3:14), that is, He is the self-existent, unchangeable, faithful God of the covenant. He exercises "lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 9:24). "Lovingkindness" refers to His *covenant mercy*. "Judgment" speaks of His *justice against sin*. "Righteousness" denotes His *moral perfection and gracious saving work*. And He is not passive: He "exercises" these things, working them visibly on earth every day.

The unbeliever is blind to this activity. He sees only politics, economics, and natural causes. But the believer, with the eye of faith, sees God ruling, judging, saving, answering prayer, sustaining the world, hardening the reprobate, drawing the elect. "The heart of the king is in the hand of the LORD" (Prov. 21:1). "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

God delights in being known: "For in these things *I delight*, saith the LORD" (Jer. 9:24). Therefore, His commandment is: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). This, says the *Catechism*, requires that I "learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone; with humility and patience, submit to Him; expect all good things from Him only; love, fear, and glorify Him with my whole heart" (Q&A. 94).

This knowledge of God is a *treasure*. It is rare. Many in Jeremiah's day did not have it. Many today do not. The world is on the broad road to destruction. Only a few find the narrow way. To know God is more precious than gold. It is the pearl of great price.

And what of the Christian life? Where would you be without this knowledge? Tossed by every wind, enslaved to the world's lies. But now, by grace, you have a foundation: You know the true and living God. And this knowledge is deep and layered – like knowing a *person*, not a proposition. You grow in it. You dwell with God. You speak with Him. You see His hand in all things. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

This knowledge is possible only through Jesus Christ, who is the supreme revelation of God: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). The Son of God came into the world to reveal the Father's name (John 17:6). He died on the cross that we might know the love of God. And we are baptized into the

name – the knowledge – of the Triune God: “the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19).

Knowing God, therefore, is the centre of our faith. And it is our glory. Not a proud glorying, but a *humble, joyful amazement*: I, a sinner, know the living God! He has revealed Himself by His Word and Spirit *to me*! He has forgiven *my* sin! He has drawn *me* into fellowship with Himself!

Let him that glorieth glory in this.

*O Lord our God, Grant us the grace to know Thee rightly, to trust Thee wholly, to love Thee truly. May our boasting be in Thee alone, who exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. And may we treasure above all the knowledge of Thee in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*