

BAHRAIN REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH
The Doctrine of God (Lecture #2)
Knowability of God

January 3, 2025

Preliminary

Review: Theology Proper is the study of the knowledge of God and His relation to mankind.

Theology: Gk. Θεός (*Theos*) = God; λόγος (*logos*) = word, discourse.

Issue: Is it possible for man to know God? If so, in what sense is God known?

(i.) Issue of possibility (Knowability); (ii.) Issue of substance of knowledge (Theology)

Jeremiah 9:23, 24 = *Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."*

Biblical Presentation

Incomprehensibility of God

Definition: [John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 21] – “To say that God is incomprehensible is to say that our knowledge is never equivalent to God’s own knowledge, that we never know Him precisely as He knows Himself.”

Point: [Keith Mathison, *The Incomprehensibility of God*] – “When we say that God is incomprehensible, we do *not* mean that we cannot know anything at all about God. What we do mean is that we cannot know Him exhaustively and comprehensively. Why not? Because God is infinite and we are finite”

➤ Latin: *Finitum non capax infiniti* = The finite cannot grasp (or contain) the infinite.

1. Biblical Language

(a) Man cannot see God... Ex 33:20; Jn 1:18; 1 Tim 6:16

➤ The point is not God’s invisibility to man’s sight, but the infinite gap between the Creator and creature

➤ Prohibition on idolatry implies that nothing can picture God adequately... Ex 20:4; Deut 4:12, 15

(b) God is incomparable to man... Isa 40:18, 25; 46:5

(c) God is beyond the complete grasp of finite minds... Ps 145:3; Isa 55:8-9; Deut 29:29

➤ Man has but a small knowledge of God... Job 26:14; 36:26; 37:5; Ps 139:6

Romans 11:33-34 = *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"*

2. Spiritual Implication

(a) Corrective to man’s pride of knowledge...

1 Corinthians 8:2 = *If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know*

Point: Essential to humility – admission of our limitation to know questions that pertains to God... Ps 131:1

[Mathison, *ibid*] – “What are the implications of this doctrine? At the very least, it should encourage humility. Our God is infinitely exalted above us. We must understand our place as creatures in relation to the Creator. In theology, the incomprehensibility of God also means that we have to be willing to acknowledge our ignorance at times. We need to be able to say “I don’t know” when we do not know.”

(b) Inexhaustibility of the process of knowing God... Eph 3:18f; Rom 11:33f

[Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 150] – “The doctrine of God’s incomprehensibility has much positive application for our own lives. It means that we will never be able to know ‘too much’ about God, for we will never run out of things to learn about him and we will thus never tire of delighting in the discovery of more and more of his excellence and of the greatness of his works.”

Knowability of God

Note: We cannot know God exhaustively (incomprehensible), but we can know Him truly and genuinely (knowable)

[Mathison, *ibid*] – “When we say that God is incomprehensible, we do *not* mean that we cannot know anything at all about God. God has revealed Himself to us and therefore we can know something about Him. We know something of God through both His general and His special revelation. His creation reveals truth about Him (Romans 1:19–21), and His written word reveals truth about Him (2 Timothy 3:16). It is important to note, however, that He has not revealed everything about Himself to us. Instead His revelation is according to our finite capacity.”

[Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 31] – “Reformed theology holds that God can be known, but that it is impossible for man to have a knowledge of Him that is exhaustive and perfect in every way”

Question: How do we know that God exists?

(a) All people have an inner sense of God... Rom 1:18, 20, 21, 25; Ps 14:1; 53:1; Rom 2:14-16

[John Calvin, *Institutes*: I.3.1] – “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will.”

(b) Christians believe the evidence that is found in Scripture and in nature... Rom 1:20; Col 1:16-17; Isa 45:18

[James Anderson, *The Existence of God*] – “The existence and attributes of God are evident from the creation itself, even though sinful human beings suppress and distort their natural knowledge of God.”

Growing in the Knowledge of God

Issue: How then shall we live? or What should be our proper response?

Note: We must always remember that in the Christian life we are concerned not only about what we know, but also about how we live in light of what we know!

Psalm 105:4-5 = *Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!*⁵ *Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered*

Proverbs 2:2-5 = *making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; ³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures*

Psalm 27:8 = *You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.”*

Philippians 3:7-8 = *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

➤ But, it is not enough to begin seeking the Lord; it must become the life-long practice of our lives.

Hosea 6:3 = *Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord*

Point: We are not to be casual or apathetic in our pursuit of the person and will of God, but determined and active—even ambitious.

Challenge: [Paul Washer, *Knowing The Living God*, 9] – “The more we know Him, the more we will respect and honor Him with our lives... To know Him and please Him should be our magnificent obsession and the controlling truth of our lives”

The Great Source of Knowledge

Issue: How are we to seek the knowledge of God?

Answer: We seek the knowledge of God through prayerful study of the Word of God—the Scriptures.

1. Scriptures: The only truly trustworthy source of the knowledge of God

Point: The totality of the Scriptures is from the mouth of God and is therefore without error and entirely trustworthy

2 Timothy 3:16 = *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*

Psalm 12:6 = *The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times*

Challenge: Devote yourself to reading and listening to God's Word... 1 Tim 4:13; Heb 4:12

Ezra 7:10 = (a) Study the Scriptures; (b) Practice or obeyed the Scriptures; (c) Thought to others the Scriptures

2. Seek the Lord through prayer... Jer 29:11-14; Mt 7:7-8

Note: Prayer is an essential element to all that we do in the Christian life, especially with regard to the knowledge of God and the study of Scripture.

Psalm 119:18 = *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law*

Jeremiah 33:2-3 = *Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: ³ Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.*