

The Knowability of God

Our lesson will unpack the following statement: though we can never understand God *fully*, we can nevertheless know Him *truly*.

We Can Never Fully Understand God

Because God is infinite and we are finite, we can never fully or exhaustively understand Him.

- Psa. 145:3 - “Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; His greatness is unsearchable.”
 - God's greatness is beyond searching out or discovering.
 - It is “unfathomable” (cf. NET, NIV, NLT).
- Psa. 147:5 - “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure” (NET - “there is no limit to His wisdom”).
- Isa. 55:9 - “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”
- Rom. 11:33 - “Oh, the depth of the riches and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!”
 - The Greek word for “inscrutable” literally means “not to be tracked out” (cf. KJV – “His ways [are] past finding out”).

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God's greatness, understanding, knowledge, riches, wisdom, judgments, and ways are *all* beyond our ability to understand fully.

- Though we may know *something* of God, we can never know Him completely or exhaustively.

As Grudem notes, this doctrine of God's incomprehensibility has much positive application to our own lives.

- We will never be able to know “too much” about God, for we will never run out of things to learn about Him, and thus we will never tire of delighting in the discovery of more and more of His excellence and of the greatness of His works.

- Even in the age to come, when we are freed from the presence of sin, we will never be able fully to understand God or any one thing about Him.
 - Cf. The conclusion of the Chronicles of Narnia: “And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page; now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.”
- Thus, God's incomprehensibility is not merely due to our sinfulness; it is also the result of His infinite greatness. It is because God is infinite, and that we are finite, that we will never be able to understand Him fully.

Yet We Can Know God Truly

Even though we cannot know God exhaustively, we can know *true* things about Him.

- This is because we have true knowledge of God from Scripture, even though we do not have exhaustive knowledge.

Even more significantly, it is *God Himself* whom we know, and not merely facts about Him or actions He does.

- 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” (Jer. 9:23-24).
- “Now this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

How We Know God

All persons everywhere have a deep, inner sense that God exists, that they are His creatures, and that by observing nature, He is their Creator.

- In Romans 1:19-22, Paul says that even Gentile unbelievers “knew God” but did not honor (lit. “glorify”) Him as God or give thanks to Him.

- In Romans 1:25, he says that the Gentiles have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie,” implying that they actively and willfully reject the truth of God's existence and character that they already know (cf. 1:18), since “what can be known about God is plain to them,” since God has shown it to them (1:19).

This is why David, speaking in the Holy Spirit, calls people who deny the existence of God “fools” (cf. Psa. 14:1; 53:1).

- The Hebrew word for “fool” (*nabal*) usually refer to the person who acts foolishly in a moral sense. When used of Israel, it often denotes the idea of their apostasy from YHWH.¹
 - This understanding of the word is verified in Psa. 10:3-4, where David says, “For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek Him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God”.”

As Paul says, it is one's *sin* that causes them to deny their knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18), which is why they are “without excuse” for their denial of God.

- Psa. 19:1 - “The heavens are declaring the glory of God and the sky above is declaring the work of His hands.”
- Cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:23-30
- Grudem: “If our hearts and minds were not so blinded by sin, it would be impossible for us to look closely at a leaf from any tree and say, 'No one created this: it just happened.'”

In addition to a visible creation, God has also given us the gift of a moral conscience.

- Rom. 2:14-15

However, God's revelation of Himself through creation and conscience are sufficient only for our condemnation.

Only God's revelation of Himself through Scripture can bring about our salvation.

¹ See “*nbl*” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 10-12.s

Finally, it must be remembered that in this sinful world, *God must enable us to be persuaded* or we would never believe in Him.

- According to Scripture, the natural person is dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), spiritually blind (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Matt. 13:14-15), have an unresponsive, 'stony' heart (Eze. 36:26) that is only hostile to God (Rom. 8:7), and are ultimately slaves of the sin they love so much they are unwilling to part with it (Rom. 6:17-18; Eph. 2:2).

Ultimately, we are dependent upon God to remove the blindness and irrationality caused by sin and to enable us to evaluate the evidence rightly, believe what Scripture says, and come to saving faith in Christ.²

Recap:

1. Though we can know God, we can never know Him fully or comprehensively.
 - A. We can gain knowledge about God and His existence through His creation and our conscience. But this is sufficient only for our condemnation, not our salvation.
 - B. But to know God savingly, we need the Scriptures (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21).
2. Though we cannot know God comprehensively, we can know Him truly.
 - Again, this requires the Scriptures (John 17:17).

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 144.