

Coram Deo

Lesson 1—Knowing God

TRUTH

A proper understanding of God and His attributes can transform our thinking, provide us with insight for living, and give us a deeper appreciation for our life in Christ. As Christians, knowing God should be our greatest pursuit and the continuous aim of our lives. We should always endeavor to understand what it means to live *Coram Deo*—“before the face of God.” With that in mind, the following lessons will focus on the attributes of God as they are revealed to us in Scripture.

The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.

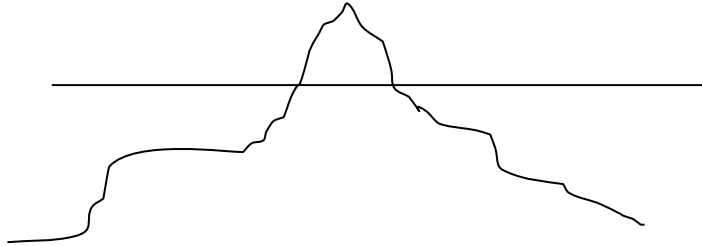
But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe... Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. (Sermon introduction, C.H. Spurgeon)

The more we understand God and His perfection, the more we grasp the depths of our own sin and our pitiful condition outside of Christ. By the same token, a proper understanding of human depravity brings to light the radiance of God’s holiness and grace. The Bible teaches that our God is immense and incomprehensible, but also personal, gracious, *and able to be known*. The Westminster Confession reminds us of this:

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. (Westminster Confession, Ch. 2.1)

As with any study of Scripture, the purpose of these lessons and activities is not simply to increase our knowledge, but to transform our very lives. This involves knowing and understanding (with the head), believing and owning (with the heart), and applying or doing (with the hands).

But how can we know God when He is frequently described using terms such as “invisible,” “immeasurable,” and “incomprehensible?” This image of an iceberg helps answer that question:



The large portion of the iceberg underneath the waterline reminds us that we cannot know God exhaustively. This is the part of the iceberg that is, essentially, invisible, immeasurable, and incomprehensible! And yet there remains a significant portion of the iceberg that *is* clearly visible above the water, hinting at a deeper reality underneath and reminding us that we *can* know true things about God.

How? Our primary source is Scripture itself. God reveals Himself to us through the Bible, or “special revelation.” He also reveals Himself through “general revelation,” or things we can learn about Him through nature, science, or human reasoning.

The Belgic Confession helps define these terms:

We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God, even his everlasting power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation. (Belgic Confession, Article 2)

It is also important to note that some of God’s attributes are “incommunicable” while others are “communicable.” Theologian Matt Slick explains:

*The **incommunicable** attributes of God are those that belong to God alone (omniscience, transcendence, etc.,) where the **communicable** attributes of God are those that we can also possess (knowledge, love, mercy, etc.). However, we have to realize that all of our discussions about God's attributes are going to ultimately be inadequate. God is, after all, infinite in his perfections. (“What are the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God?”, carm.org)*

While we cannot know Him fully, the Bible nevertheless contains numerous references to the importance of *knowing* God. Consider the following passages:

Jeremiah 9:23-24

²³This is what the LORD says:

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
or the strong man boast of his strength
or the rich man boast of his riches,

²⁴but let him who boasts boast about this:

that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight," declares the LORD.
[emphasis added]

John 17:3

³Now this is eternal life:

that they *may know you*,
the only true God,
and Jesus Christ,
whom you have sent.
[emphasis added]

As we have already noted, knowing God is more than knowledge *about* Him. True knowledge is knowing God personally.

The Greek word for "to know" is gnosis. *Strong's Greek Concordance* defines gnosis as:

Functional ("working") knowledge gleaned from first-hand (personal) experience, connecting theory to the application; "application-knowledge," gained in (by) a direct relationship.

2. How can we know God when He is described as invisible, immeasurable, and incomprehensible?

3. Review Jeremiah 9:23-24 in the TRUTH section. This passage reminds us that we are often distracted by self-centered priorities (v. 23), but also that there is one thing that is worthy of our boasting (v. 24). With this in mind, what does it mean *to know God*?

4. Read the following quotes:

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God. (Packer, Knowing God, 29)

Knowing God, then, is living each day in conscious loving dependence upon him, wholly persuaded that the troubles and pains of life are no less his work than the blessings and victories... We see, then, that knowing God is a relational or personal experience. This is but to say that it always exists and operates within the context of commitment, trust, faith and obedience. (Storms, The Grandeur of God, 20)

What do these quotes teach us about knowing God?

5. Knowing God is more than an academic pursuit. Why is this statement true?

6. J.I. Packer states, "Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord" (*Knowing God*, 29). How does one's view of God impact his/her everyday life?

A Prayer

*O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, that so I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then give me grace to raise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus' Name, Amen. (A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 20)*

ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Before your group study, review the questions in the EQUIP section. Are there specific truths or principles that God impresses upon you? It might be a knowledge issue (head), a belief issue (heart), or an application issue (hand). Write your reflections below:



Head/knowledge:



Heart/belief:



Hand/application:

2. Are there ways in which you think and live that do not reflect a *gnósis* knowledge of God? Be specific and share them with the group!

MISSION

1. How can you use general revelation to point people to Jesus?

2. How can your *gnósis* knowledge of God be used as a tool for sharing the Good News with others?

3. Who are the three people (non-believers) you are praying for?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. List the steps you have taken—or will take—to connect with them:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

