Section: Doctrine of God

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q6. How can we know about God?**

We can never fully understand all of God exhaustively, yet we can know God truly. We can know about God through His creation and His revelation. The holy Bible is the true and final source for our understanding of God and His will for His creation.

Let’s look at the first part of our answer:

We can never fully understand all of God exhaustively

This is important for us to start with because we need to realize that the pursuit of knowing God is not something that we will ever finish or complete. We will never reach a point where we have nothing more to discover about the greatness of God. God is the author of all creation. He knows everything about everything. Imagine if you could have such a complete knowledge of all the books ever written that you could perfectly recite every word of every page, and that you could perfectly describe the exact physical description of every person ever created, and that you could formulate the DNA of every living thing that ever lived…

Even if you had all of that knowledge it would still fall far short of what it would take to know God exhaustively.

The incomprehensibility of God is one of His glorious attributes. Listen to Paul’s words in:

 **Romans 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Paul is the author of more New Testament books than anyone else by a long shot. If anyone could ever claim to know God well it would be Paul. His very words were inspired by God. He was given authority to speak on behalf of Christ. Paul knew more about God than most could ever hope to in this life, but here he is overcome with praise and worship precisely because of our inability to fully know God!

This is a beautiful doctrine! Look at:

Job 11:7-9 "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven —what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.

God is unsearchable but that does not mean the search does not produce results, rather that the search never ends. **The idea here is not that God is unknowable. It carries the idea that there is no end to what we can learn about God.** The depth of His riches and wisdom and knowledge goes down forever, it has no bottom and no end.

It’s not just that God is limitless and unsearchable, He is also inscrutable – He is impossible to fully understand by human reason.

**Isaiah 55: 8-9** For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

This is the creator/creature distinction. In our flesh we want to dumb God down to our level. We want to think that He is like us, all be it a perfect version of us. But God is not just better than us, He is beyond us. We are created and He is Creator. He is perfectly holy and we are sinful. Apart from His work to reveal His truth to us, we would not know anything about God at all. But praise God! In His mercy and grace He has made Himself known to us! This leads us to the next part of our answer:

yet we can know God truly.

This is a very important point! Even though we cannot fully comprehend the fullness of who God is…that doesn’t mean that we cannot have full confidence in what we DO know about God from His revelation.

Everything we know about God has been revealed to us by God. As we just saw in the previous passages, that even includes us knowing that He is incomprehensible. That is something true about God that we can know with confidence because He has revealed it to us in the objective truth of His written word. Along with humbling us and giving us a cause for praise, the passages we just read are teaching us something true about God. We saw in these passages that God is not like us, His ways are not our ways, He is high and above us. This helps us in understanding our relationship to God. We are subordinate and completely dependent on Him and His grace. The only way we can know anything about God is if He reveals it to us.

We heard this point made many times during our apologetic lessons. “Unless you have complete knowledge about everything, you can’t truly know anything, because what you don’t know could disprove what you think you know. The only way we can know anything for certain is if we know someone who knows everything and they reveal it to us.”

God is the only One who knows everything - He is omniscient - or all knowing. We can know God truly because God is the One our knowledge comes from. Although He has not given us complete knowledge, the knowledge that He has given us is true because He cannot lie. The knowledge He has given us is also sufficient. We do not need to know more about God than what He has revealed to us in creation and in His word.

It is a very sad thing when some people try to justify not pursuing a greater knowledge of God because of the truth that He is incomprehensible.

It is ignorance of God’s infinite greatness and glory that would cause someone to think that if they cannot attain a completely full knowledge of God than it is not worth the effort required to learn anything about Him at all. This is folly! Those who are truly saved and have seen a glimpse of the glory of God in Christ, know that one taste of Him leads to a desire to know more.

C.H. Spurgeon:

*But the incomprehensibility of the Divine nature is not a reason why we should desist from reverent inquiry and prayerful strivings to apprehend what He has so graciously revealed of Himself in His Word. Because we are unable to acquire perfect knowledge, it would be folly to say we will therefore make no efforts to attain to any degree of it. It has been well said that, "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. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity."*

If we truly love God we will hunger and thirst to know Him more. We will spend the mental energy required to think and meditate on, and study His word.

**Mark 12: 29-30** Jesus answered, "The most important [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

To loveGod with ALL our mind would certainly include striving to know him and to understand him and His word.

If we want to love God rightly, it is and should be our goal to know God more and more. There is no greater endeavor we can pursue.

Now. I want to make an important point. I have been speaking about the reality for Christians. Being able to know God truly does not apply to unbelievers. Unbelievers can know true things about God but they do not know God anymore than I know George Washington. Knowing true things about a person does not mean that we truly know them.

Many people, and even the demons and Satan himself know God, at least in the same way that most of us know George Washington. They know that He exists, and may even know that He is the creator of everything, the same way we know that George Washington existed and that he was the 1st President of the United States.

It is possible to know lot’s of information about a person but not really know them.

When you read the gospel accounts of Jesus life and ministry, we see that the demons were among the first to proclaim the truth of who Jesus was, but they did not know Jesus because they did not see Him as lovely and they did not put their trust in Him. They did not see His radiance as beautiful because it shined the light on their evil deeds and they loved their evil deeds.

The Baptist Confession of 1689 (this is the historic document Pastor Josh referenced last week, that Christians put together centuries ago to summarize Christian doctrine)—states it this way:

"full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scriptures comes from the internal work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts. … the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for a saving understanding of what is revealed in the Word"

So, unbelievers can know true things about God, but they do not know God fully, rightly, truly.

We can only know God ***truly*** through Jesus, by the effectual work of the Holy Spirit

**1 John 5:20** *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding,* ***so that*** *we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*

Jesus became flesh and lived a perfect life of obedience to all of God’s law, and died as a perfect substitute in the place of His elect, in order that they might know Him.

Not just know ***facts*** about Him but know him personally! He has *given us understanding,* ***so that*** *we may know him who is true.*

This is an intimate knowledge. The Greek word for know here (**ginóskó)** is the same word used in Luke 1:34 ***Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?(KJV)***

She is talking about the fact that she is with child even though she has never been intimate with a man. It describes a kind of knowledge that is obtained through personal intimacy. It may be hard for you to make the connection of an intimate knowledge of God with marital intimacy but you need to see that what Christ has done for us is so much more than to just give us a cognitive awareness of who God is. He has united us to Himself as the bride of Christ.

How do we grow in this kind of knowing?

**Jeremiah 9:23-24** (NKJV) *But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord.*

Here we see that for us to know God and to please God requires more than an academic knowledge about God. We must delight in the things He delights in, namely the attributes that describe Him.

Knowing God intimately means delighting in what we know and understand about Him. And we actually understand Him. We are not coming up with our own ideas of what is loving, what is fair or just, or what is right. We get our understanding of these things from God Himself and we take Him at His word. We trust that His ways are higher than our ways and we rest in the knowledge that He is God and we are not.

God’s delight in these things is a delight in doing them. Psalm 115:3 Our God is in the heavens;

 he does all that he pleases.

If we truly delight in the things God delights in then we will be doing the things God delights in.

To get from knowing about God to knowing God, we must truly delight in God and see the fruit of that delight expressed in the practice of joyful obedience to His good commandments.

We must experience the truth of God.

**Psalm 34:8** *Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!*

Don’t just have the head knowledge that God is Good – taste it and see.

To have knowledge of the good things about God but not do them is to not know God.

*Jeremiah 4:22* "For my people(the Old Covenant nation of Israel) are foolish; **they know me not**; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are 'wise'—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not."

Notice the connection between not knowing God and not knowing how to do good. *"For my people are foolish;* ***they know me not****; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are 'wise'—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not."*

Jer. 9:5-6 Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. 6 Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, *they refuse to know me,* declares the Lord.

Doing the things that are contrary to who God is, is equated by God as the refusal to know Him. Later on Jeremiah prophesies that the inverse is also true, that to do the things that are in accord with God’s character is to know Him.

**Jer. 22:15-16** Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. *Is not this to know me?* declares the Lord.

Do you see the experiential principle here of tasting and seeing? King Josiah experienced the knowledge of God by doing what is pleasing to God and it was well with him.

**Col. 1:9-10**And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

See the progression here, as we are filled with knowledge, we walk…bearing fruit…and increasing in the knowledge of God.

**Hosea 6:6** *For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

Hosea is using a poetic style of writing here called parallelism. In this verse steadfast love is parallel to the knowledge of God just as sacrifice is parallel to burnt offerings.

True knowledge of God is accompanied by true obedience to God.

John says something very similar but with a warning attached.

*1 John 2:3-6 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

Notice that it is a not a buffet where we get to know the “parts” of God that appeal to us. God is not made up of parts so if we really want to know Him we must put in to practice (obey) ALL of His word in its completeness as He has revealed it to us.

Okay… that is how we can know God truly. Let’s get back to our Catechism answer. It says: We can never fully understand all of God exhaustively, yet we can know God truly. We can know about God through His creation and His revelation.

We can know about God through His creation and His revelation.

What we are talking about here is the two ways that God has revealed Himself – General Revelation and Special Revelation. These are two very important terms that you should become familiar with: General Revelation and Special Revelation.

First, General Revelation

General revelation refers to God’s revelation of Himself through creation, nature, and conscience. It goes out to all people generally and reveals the existence of God, His character, and His moral law.

**Romans 1:19-20** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

And Romans 2:14-15 goes on to say “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”

This reveals to us that the law of God is written on the hearts of all of mankind, by nature, by God’s design. This means all humans do know His moral law, even though fallen man suppresses and disobeys and denies it.

So, to say it again now that we’ve seen it in the text: General revelation refers to God’s revelation of Himself through creation, nature, and conscience. It goes out to all people generally and reveals the existence of God, His character, and His moral law.

Our knowledge of God through nature and creation is enough for us to know that there is a divine, infinitely powerful creator, but it is insufficient for us to know how we can be saved.

The historic confession, again, says, "The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that people are left without excuse; however, these demonstrations are **not** sufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation."

Let’s look at more of the context of our Romans passage. Starting in verse 18-25

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

We see that for those who are in sin – the unsaved, the ultimate thing that comes from the knowledge of God through nature and creation is condemnation. Do you see that? They know what can be known about God and they either outright deny it, OR what is probably more common in our culture is that they acknowledge God and in some cases even promote the truth that God exists but they do not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. They might pay lip service but they live their lives as if He doesn’t matter.

For those who believe- the saved, General Revelation is a catalyst for praise to God

**Psalm 19:1-4** *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above* *proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their* *voice* *goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for* *the sun,*

Watching a sunset, gazing at the stars, holding a new born baby, eating a great meal…it doesn’t matter what it is. For the believer, general revelation becomes 100 times more vivid and awe inspiring. It becomes a gracious assurance to us of God’s eternal power and divine nature.

Next, what is Special Revelation?

*Special revelation is redemptive revelation. It culminates in the person and work of Christ. Special revelation comes through ordinary and extraordinary means. God spoke to people through dreams, visions, theophanies (burning bush, pillar of fire, cloud of smoke), prophets, apostles, and the Scriptures. The Scriptures are our final, ultimate, and only source of Special Revelation today.*

Special revelation does not go out to all people in all places. For example, some people live and die without the Bible ever translated in their language or a missionary to teach the truth of the Bible. It is called “special” because it is not common.

**Hebrews 1:1-2** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Jesus Himself is the Word of God made manifest.

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus is called The Word of God.

**Rev. 19:13** He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

The Word of God is perfectly and fully represented in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s Word. He is the culmination of Special Revelation because His coming was and is the fulfillment of scripture. His coming brought with it the fulfillment of all OT prophecy as well as the explanation of it.

This brings us to the final part of our answer:

The holy Bible is the true and final source for our understanding of God and His will for His creation.

Let’s be clear. The Bible is not Jesus. We do not “worship” the Bible as some foolishly charge of those who look to scripture as our ultimate authority. We worship Jesus, and we serve Him only. Don’t be fooled by the argument that holding to the Bible as our ultimate authority means that we are not submitting to Christ as our ultimate authority. That’s what some people claim! They say “we submit to Christ as our authority - not the Bible” and they pit the Word of God against God Himself.

Their real objective is to weaken the authority of scripture in order to try to avoid clearly laid down teaching of God and/or to make more room for human logic and human reasoning to govern our knowledge of God. But if we are truly submitted to Christ as our Lord and King, then we will be submitted to and obedient to every word that proceeds from His mouth.

It is very sad when the Word of God is so taken for granted today. Satan’s very first act in human history was to try and undermine the truth, authority, and the sufficiency of God’s word. He accused God of lying and of withholding information from Adam and Eve and that they needed to reject the authority and sufficiency of His word if they wanted to experience true knowledge.

Well, there is nothing new under the sun, and Satan is still attempting to thwart and undermine God’s word today. One of the ways he does this is by feeding into our desire to be entertained. We are fascinated with signs and wonders and many are tempted to think that if God would speak today in these same ways, it would be more convincing and more effective in bringing people to faith. But we know that this just isn’t the case!

Scripture is full of stories showing that the presence of miraculous signs and wonders do not in and of themselves cause a person to believe.

In Luke 16 Jesus tells the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Both men are Jews – sons of Abraham. The rich man, who lives a lavish life of comfort, and Lazarus- the poor man who laid at the rich man’s gate covered in sores, begging for scraps that fell from his table, both die. Lazarus is carried to Abraham’s side while the rich man is tormented in Hell. The rich man sees Abraham and Lazarus far off and he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to cool his tongue with a drop of water from his finger. Abraham explains that there is a great chasm between them and neither can pass over to the other. So the rich man responds in verse 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment. ' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. ' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. ' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. '"

The point Jesus is making at the end here is that the scriptures are sufficient for a person to repent. Truth does not become more true when it is accompanied by signs and wonders. Signs and wonders had their place but they were primarily to display the credibility of the person speaking, i.e, Moses and the Prophets.

Jesus performed many signs and wonders. He did more miracles than anyone ever, and yet most of the people who witnessed these things rejected Him because of His words. His word offended them so it didn’t matter how compelling His miracles were. Many people were not interested in who He was as much as in what He could give them.

After performing the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd followed Jesus across the sea, and when He made it clear He was not going to give them another free meal - that what He was actually offering them was not temporary bread but eternal life - many of them left, including many of His disciples. The works that Jesus had already done should have given validation to His words, but the crowd was not interested in the truth, they were only interested in getting their bellies filled.

All of this truth is contained within the words of scripture. We do not need any further validation. The Truth of the Bible is self-authenticating, meaning that the truth within it is self-evident.

The Baptist Confession of 1689 says “The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience…the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church. To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary.”

“The whole counsel of God concerning everything essential for his own glory and man’s salvation, faith, and life is either explicitly stated or by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures.” –LBC 1689

God forbid we ever fall prey to thinking that the Bible is not enough. We must understand that the Bible is more fully confirmed than any of the other ways that God has communicated in history. Look with me at:

**2 Peter 1:16-21** For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The prophetic word is referring to scripture. A prophet is a person who speaks the words of God. The Bible is the prophetic word – God’s word being proclaimed in written form.

Do you see what Peter is saying here!? He is saying that Scripture, the written word of the prophets and apostles is more fully confirmed, we can trust the Bible! It is “the true and final source for our understanding of God and His will for His creation.”

What the apostles witnessed with their eyes and ears certainly gave them an assurance and confidence of the Majestic Glory of Christ, but it is the prophetic word (Scripture) that gives the most confidence and assurance.

The Bible – made up of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament - is the FULL revelation of God’s word. It contains every word from God that He has deemed necessary for us.

**1 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Again…ALL scripture is God’s word, and it provides us all that we need in order to be complete- not lacking anything, equipped for EVERY good work – not most good works. We do not need to go anywhere else to become fully trained in righteousness.

The holy Bible is the true and final source for our understanding of God and His will for His creation.

Is what you know (or think you know) about God based on the objective truth found in Scripture - His word, or is it based on your own experiences and thoughts apart from Scripture, things you have been told by others apart from Scripture, or things that you come to based solely on human logic? God’s Word is never illogical, but because of sin, human logic can often distort and corrupt God’s word.

All of these other ways that people claim to know God are subjective to each person’s own experience. That is one of the obvious problems with this kind of knowledge. There is no way to be certain of what’s true when people have differing opinions/experiences.

The Bible gives us uncompromised truth that can be known with certainty. It is not subjective like us…it is objective. God’s truth is unchanging. It is trustworthy. That does not mean that it is always easy to understand. We need to be on guard against ignorance and error.

**2 Peter 3:16-17** as [Paul] does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

The Bible can be hard to understand but as long as we know that going into it we can be careful not to get carried away by twisted and destructive error of lawless people.

The Baptist confession gives this helpful assertion, "Some things in Scripture are clearer than others, and some people understand the teachings more clearly than others. However, the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one part of Scripture or another that both the educated and uneducated may achieve a sufficient understanding of them by properly using ordinary measures."

So take heart, read the Scriptures and listen to the Scriptures being taught faithfully, and know that God (through the work of the Holy Spirit) gives understanding to those whom He has called. PhD not needed, 50 years in the faith not needed, seminary not needed for God’s people who faithfully live in the Scriptures to know the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed.

Closing Summary

If we want to **know God** we must begin with true knowledge **about** God—and the final source of true knowledge about God is Scripture. It is possible to have knowledge about God without having a true knowledge of God, but it is not possible to have a true knowledge of God without having knowledge about God. If we want to love God with our hearts we must love Him with our minds. Our hearts cannot embrace any object or being that we do not first have knowledge of in our minds.

The knowledge of God begins with knowledge about God. We should never think that the academic pursuit of facts about God is in any way wrong or not worthwhile. We can know if our knowledge is true and not a deception by examining the fruit that it is producing. If we are doing lots of studying and growing in our ability to explain and understand doctrine but we examine our lives and don’t see any real change in the way we are living, that is an indication that we are not receiving the word with faith. When we are growing in true knowledge of God we will be able to see it bearing fruit in our application of that knowledge.

**Q6. How can we know about God?**

We can never fully understand all of God exhaustively, yet we can know God truly. We can know about God through His creation and His revelation. The holy Bible is the true and final source for our understanding of God and His will for His creation.

Let’s live in Scripture to know the great God truly! Let’s pray.