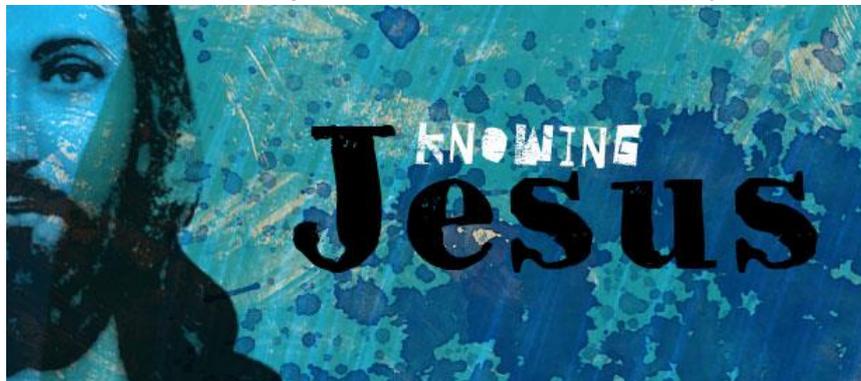


Systematic Theology part 2.2: **The knowability of God**

*Can we really know God?
How much of God can we know?*

Can we really Know God? Many would say that they know



information about Him, but there is a vast difference between knowing about someone and knowing them. I could say that I knew about the Prime Minister but if I said I knew him, that would imply

that I had met him. There are many who think that knowing God is knowing about him. But the Bible doesn't talk in that way. Jesus says in His prayer to His Father: "And this is eternal Life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3). The promise of the New Covenant or New Testament of Jesus Christ is that all shall know God, "from the least of them to the greatest" (Heb 8:11). John can say "I write to you, little children, because you know the Father." (1 John 2:13).

How to know the Lord:

No man can ever know the Lord by his own efforts. That's because God is perfect and man imperfect, having within him the disease of sin, like a serpent's poison. But as Jesus said: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." (John 3:14-15). The Children of Israel were being bitten by snakes and dying in the wilderness. God instructed Moses to lift up a snake made of bronze, and everyone who looked at the snake lived. We come to know the Lord when we turn away from our sins, living for self, and turn to Jesus; we then have the gift of eternal life, as He says in the next well known verse: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16)

Can we stop knowing him if we backslide?

Like knowing a person, once we know God we can't then not know Him; however, if we don't maintain a close relationship with Him we can live far from His presence. But we also need to examine ourselves to see if we really knew the Lord in the first place; as Jesus said to the five foolish virgins "I don't know you" (Matt 25:12). They knew about the bridegroom and that He was coming but did not actually have a relationship with Him. He said the same to those who hear the word but don't put it into practice: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt 7:22,23.)

The necessity for God to reveal Himself to us

God chose to reveal Himself to all men through creation; yet with regards to the personal knowledge of God that comes with salvation, Jesus says: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and *any one to whom the Father chooses to reveal him*" (Matt 11:27)

Neither is God known through human effort or wisdom: "In the wisdom of God *the world did not know God through wisdom*" (1 Cor 1:21)

We can never fully understand God.

Because God is infinite and we are finite or limited, we can never fully understand Him. In this sense God is said to be *incomprehensible*, where the term means "unable to be understood"; however it is not true that He can't be understood but that He can't be understood fully or exhaustively.

Psalm 145 says: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness *unsearchable*" and Psalm 147: "*..His understanding beyond measure*". David says: "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it*". (139:6,7)

Paul says: "no one comprehends the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:10-12). At the end of a long discourse on the history of God's great plan of redemption, Paul breaks into praise: "O the depth

of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom 11:33)

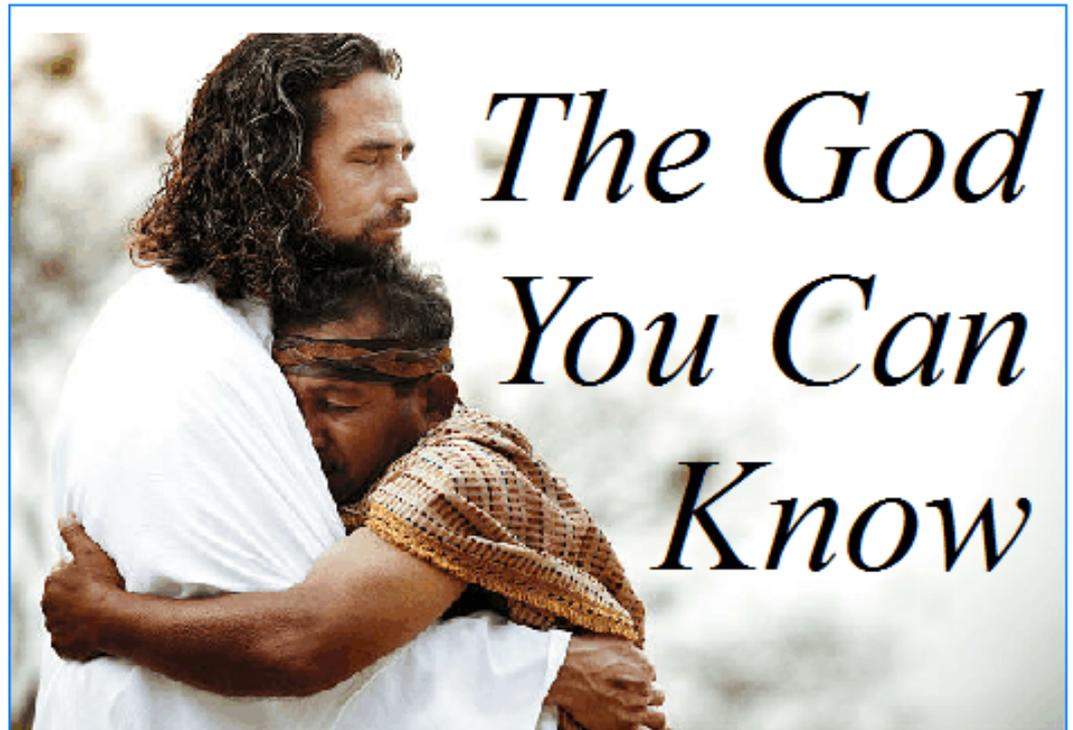
As we grow daily in our knowledge of God we need to maintain humility as our prime attitude of heart. It’s so easy for an attitude of smugness, of thinking we know and of pride to creep in. However much we’ve studied, however much we experience, we should be like the astronomer

who the more he discovers, the more he realises there is still to discover. Without this attitude we easily become proud and our relationship with God also becomes stale; we lose our joy and do things out of habit and

duty. Our relationship with God should be exciting and vibrant; this is maintained by constant meditation on His Word, prayer and putting love and justice into practice. Isaiah says: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (55:9). Job says that God’s great acts in creating and sustaining the earth are “but the outskirts of his ways” and exclaims “how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14. cf. 11:7-9; 37:5)

Grudem comments: “So we will never run out of things to learn about him, and we will thus never tire in delighting in the discovery of more and more of his excellence and of the greatness of his work.” David said: “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I were to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand” (Ps 139:17-18)

Increasing in the knowledge of God



Paul tells us to live a life “worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him”. It must be one in which we are continually “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10); we should be growing in our knowledge of God throughout our entire lives.

Conclusion:

Our faith is based firstly on the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, and it is Jesus’ references to God as the creator that cause us to believe in His existence and it is his statements about him that confirm that we can know God. Let’s grow in the knowledge of God “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Eph 4:13

All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted
loss
Spent and worthless now compared to
this

*Knowing You, Jesus, knowing You
There is no greater thing
You’re my all, You’re the best
You’re my joy, my righteousness
And I love You Lord*

Now my heart’s desire is to know You
more
To be found in You and know as Yours
To possess by faith what I could
not earn
All surpassing gift of righteousness

Oh to know the power of Your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like You in Your death, my
Lord
So with You to live and never die

Questions to discuss relating to 2:1 “The existence of God and 2:2 The Knowability of God:

How do we know that God exists?

What should we answer to those who doubt his existence?

How can we know God?

Can we fall away from our knowledge of Him?

Why is it important that we can’t know everything about God?

What should be our aim in this regard?

Acknowledgements and further reading: the Systematic Theology of Wayne Grudem.