

Digging Deep: Exploring the Joy of Systematic Theology

Class 6: The Doctrine of God, part 2

The Knowability of God and Introduction to His Incommunicable Attributes

“For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

– Acts 17:23

I. The Knowability of God

a. We can never fully understand God

The incomprehensibility of God – We are able to understand some things about God, but we cannot fully understand Him.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. – Psalm 145:3

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. – Psalm 147:5

O, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways – Romans 11:33

For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. – 1 Corinthians 2:11

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. – Isaiah 55:9

b. We can know true things about God

We know about God from His Word, the Scriptures. They tell us about God and His works. And everything they tell us about God is true about Him.

So, we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him - 1 John 4:16

Yet, You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Psalm 22:3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. – John 1:1-4

c. We can truly know God, not just facts about Him or His actions

God not only says in His word that we can know Him, but it is also the greatest privilege and joy of the Christian life. We can have a personal relationship with the eternal, living God, in Jesus Christ and to spend eternity knowing Him and being in His presence.

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the wealthy man in his riches. But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, who exercises loving devotion, justice and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things." - Jeremiah 9:23-24

And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. – John 17:3

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true – 1 John 5:20

For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. – 1 Corinthians 13:12

There is no peace like the peace of those whose minds are possessed with full assurance that they have known God, and God has known them, and that this relationship guarantees God's favor to them in life, through death and on forever. - J.I. Packer, Knowing God

The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts. - A.W. Tozer

II. The Character of God: His Attributes

Incommunicable and Communicable attributes of God

- **Communicable attributes:** Those that God does not share or communicate to others
- **Incommunicable attributes:** Those that God does share and communicate to others

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law – Deuteronomy 29:29

You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. – Micah 7:20

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. – Psalm 85:7

The problem with this distinction...

Every one of God's attributes is *infinite*, so we can never fully understand or receive any of them. Both communicable and incommunicable attributes are ones we share from God to a greater or lesser degree. There is overlap between the two definitions. Examples:

- **Communicable - Wisdom:** We can be wise but not infinitely wise
- **Incommunicable – Independence:** While we can act independently, we always have some level of dependence on something or someone else. God alone does not depend on anything or anyone throughout eternity.

III. Introduction to God's Incommunicable Attributes

There are five incommunicable attributes of God that theologians generally speak of. We may display some aspects of them, but God alone has them in an infinite and unique way

Lord willing, we will look at what these are next week in more detail, and how Scripture shows us each one!

- **Independence** - God does not depend on or need anything. He is self-existent and dependent. Yet He receives glory from us and His creation
- **Unchangeableness** - God is unchanging in His being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and He acts and feels differently in response to different situations.
- **Eternity** - God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in His own being, and He sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.
- **Omnipresence** - God does not have size or special dimensions, and is present at every point of space (**my add: and outside of creation**) with His whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.
- **Unity** - God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times.

Spiritual delight in God arises chiefly from His beauty and perfection, not from the blessings He give us. - Jonathan Edwards

God is perfectly good. All the perfection we can arrive at in this life is sincerity. We may resemble God a little, but not equal Him; He is infinitely perfect - Thomas Watson