

HOW DO WE KNOW GOD?

The Doctrine of God

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Introduction

- The Westminster Shorter Catechism states, “That the chief aim of man is to know God and enjoy him forever.”
- “But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord” (Jer 9:24 ESV)

John 3

- Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we **know** you are a teacher who has come from God” (3:2)
 - that Jesus performed many miracles
 - these miracles authenticated him as a teacher from God
 - Jesus was one to whom he should listen
- Jesus rebutted, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (3:3)

John 3

- “How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked, ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’” (3:4)
- Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit” (3:5; cf. Eze 36:25-27)
- Jesus said that true knowledge began with spiritual knowledge found in God’s revelation of himself in the Bible

Contemporary Crisis of Knowledge

- Approach to knowledge by reason alone (e.g., science)
- Approach to knowledge through experience (e.g., Jesus loves me)
- Approach to knowledge by the Holy Spirit in accordance with his word (1 Cor 2:10-13)

Knowing God Personally

- “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7)
- “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov 9:10)
- Knowing God in relationship to us (*yada* and *ginosko*)
- Knowing God in the context of knowing ourselves
- Knowledge of God takes place in the context of Christian piety, worship, and devotion

J. I. Packer on Knowing God

- A matter of personal dealing—knowing about him vs. knowing of him or dealing with him. Knowing about him is a precondition of trusting in him (Rom 10:14)
- A matter of personal involvement—mind, will, and feeling (Ps 34:8)
- A matter of grace—because God initiates the relationship and reveals himself to us

J. I. Packer on *Knowing God*

- Involves listening to and applying God's Word
- Notes God's nature and character
- Accepts his invitation and obeys his commands
- Draws one into a divine fellowship

Evidences of Knowing God

- Those who know God have great energy for God
- Those who know God have great thoughts of God
- Those who know God show great boldness for God
- Those who know God have great contentment in God

Question

How may I know and understand the Bible?

- From the divine standpoint, it is the doctrine of the *illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit*
- From the human standpoint, it is the *exercise of biblical interpretation*

Illumination in 1 Corinthians

- Revelation or divine wisdom hidden (1 Cor 2:6-8, 10)
- It is known and revealed by the Spirit (vv. 9-11)
- The Spirit provides the foundation for Christian epistemology (v. 12)
- The Spirit illuminates in words taught by the Spirit (v. 13)

Illumination in 1 Corinthians

- Knowing God is relational and involves the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-16)
- “What we have received (**δεχομαι** or “accepted”) is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us (2:12)
- “This is what we speak, not in words (**λόγοις**) taught (**διδασκτοίς**) us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (2:13)
- The “natural” person is unable to perceive or understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14)

Word and Spirit

- On the one hand, without the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Bible is a dead book for unregenerate people
- On the other hand, without proper understanding of the Bible and just the Holy Spirit, the result is mere experience or even relativism

Word and Spirit

- The Word of God, correctly interpreted, is the objective basis of authority. Here, the work of the Spirit works in and through sound exegesis
- The illuminating work of the Spirit is the subjective dimension. The Spirit works and guides the reader/hearer in applying the Word to contemporary situations
- Together, Word and Spirit offer balance

Key Distinctions

- Revelation—the act of God whereby he discloses himself to us through general and special revelation
- Illumination—the act of the Spirit, whereby he grants spiritual insight and the truthful perception regarding the Bible
- Interpretation—the process of understanding the original meaning of the biblical text in its historical, literary, and cultural context

Discussion Questions

- How do you know if you are a true Christian?
- What is the importance of 1 Cor 2:14 in relation to the Holy Spirit?
- What does knowing God mean for you?