

## God Is Knowable

For centuries of generations, millions of people got diseases from bacteria that they couldn't see and didn't know existed. They didn't know about penicillin or other antibiotics that could have cured many of those diseases to significantly change the quality of life, in fact save the lives of people. Within our own generation people didn't know the difference that something as simple as taking an aspirin every day can do to reduce the risk of heart attacks, even though aspirin has been available for a very long time and was in most people's medicine cabinets.

Just as there are millions of people every year who pay for services that they can get free through the US government — information about social security and all kinds of other things. By calling an 800 number or writing a letter to Pueblo, Colorado, you can get the information you need instead of paying a service to do it, but they just don't know. You see, good isn't really very much good if you don't know about it. If you don't have access to it.

God is great; God is good; God is holy; God is love — but if we don't personally know God then that which is otherwise very good news isn't good news at all. This is not a minor matter. Actually it could not be more important, this whole business of knowing God.

The problem is that from the very beginning, God is beyond our comprehension. The Bible says in Psalm 145:3, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom." The greatness of God is deeper than the deepest ocean — it is beyond our ability to comprehend. In Psalm 147:5 it says, "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit." God is infinite, there is no limit to the understanding of God. But we are finite, we have all kinds of limits and therefore we cannot fully comprehend Him.

The first computer that our family ever owned was an Apple 2C. I remember when I brought it home at Christmas time. I set it up right there in the living room — the monitor, the keyboard and the printer. It was a wonderful event! By today's standards that computer would be considered very primitive. You had to put in the program you wanted to use on very large floppy disks for there was no hard drive. Suppose you were to take that old Apple 2C, set it on your desk and go out to a store and buy the Windows program on CD rom or on 3.5 inch floppy disks. When you brought that program home and tried to set it up on the Apple

2C you'd find that there is no place to insert either the 3.5 inch floppy disk or the CD rom because computers then didn't have those types of drives. No matter what amount of money you'd spend to try and solve the problem, there would be no way for that simple computer to receive the information.

It is much the same way with us and with God. We are finite humans and when we try to comprehend the infinite God, there just isn't a connection point. There is no way that that information can be correctly installed in our minds and even if there were, the vast amounts of data about the personality, power and presence of God is far, far beyond anything for which we have capacity. So a lifetime of trying would never make any difference. God is incomprehensible.

It is further explained in the New Testament in Romans 11:33-36.

*Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgment, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things.*

Another way of saying it is God is the creator and we are the creatures. He made everything including us. So that from him and through him and to him are all

***The only way for us to know anything about God is for God to pass that information along to us. The marvelous news is that he has.***

things. Everything. God is so much bigger, so much better, so much smarter, so much the creator that we are unable to fully

understand him. It would be like a painting trying to understand the painter, or a car trying to understand General Motors, or maybe a cloned sheep trying to understand the biologist. It's not going to happen.

God is in a different category than we are. God is the Creator; we are the creatures. He is so much higher that there is just no way for us to become like him. I suppose in its simplest expression we'd say God is God and we are not God. Those are enormously diverse categories. We can't know God unless God somehow makes himself known to us. If God will take the initiative, if God who is so much smarter and so much better and so much greater, if he would reach out to us in our ignorance, then we could know that he is great and good and that he is holy and loving. But if it is up to us, a million years of scientific discovery would never tell us much of anything about God.

In scientific research, human scientists, in a sense, stand above the object that is being researched whether that object is a virus or a volcano or some distant galaxy that is studied through a telescope. We can rightly use that method to discover all kinds of information and to get all types of knowledge about the world and the universe around us. But that methodology does not work with a God who is superior to us. It is a method that does not work up the chain. So just as a virus cannot study and discover a physician or a piece of space debris cannot study about an astronomer or an astrophysicist, so we cannot discover and learn about God on our own because he is distantly superior. The only way for us to know anything about God is for God to pass that information along to us.

The marvelous news is that he has. He has done this essentially through three different channels: through creation, through Jesus and through the Bible. Psalm 19:1 explains, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” That is to say that if we take a good look at the world around us — the galaxies, the heavens above us — that we can learn a great deal about who God is as well as about what he has created.

There is more detail that is given in the New Testament. In Romans 1:19-20 we read, “Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” Paul is saying that we can look at creation and find out things about God that would otherwise be invisible. We can learn about and know about God through an exploration and study of what he has created.

Let’s suppose that we presented the works of three artists: on the left you have one of the works of Michelangelo, in the center a work by Picasso and to the right one of the works of Charles Schultz. You are going to compare these three different works. To the one extreme you have Michelangelo’s Moses or David and to the other extreme you have Charles Schultz’ Charlie Brown or Linus. If you just looked at the artwork that was drawn or sculpted and knew nothing about the artist, you could tell a lot. You could tell there is a big difference between Michelangelo and Picasso. You could tell that there is a huge difference between Michelangelo and Charles Schultz. You would be able to tell invisible things about them from the artwork which they created.

We also can tell invisible things about God from the creation that we study and explore. Among the things that we can learn are about God’s eternal power and even about his divine nature.

I want to insert here a sort of side bar or diversion. In the history of modern scientific discovery (if

you count the beginning of the scientific age somewhere around the period of the Renaissance) if you look at its foundations, you would see that initially scientists set out to discover the world so that they could know God. There was a direct attachment, an underlying assumption or presupposition there. They felt that the more there was exploration of medicine, biology or botany — or any of the sciences — the more we were tapping into the marvels of what God has done and the more we would understand about him.

There are many scientists today who have exactly the same approach — awed by all of the information, data, creativity and marvels of the world in which we live — and therefore understanding God all the more. Unfortunately, there are many who have tried to remove God as the cornerstone and basis of scientific discovery. Then science itself becomes God or it becomes an end all of its own, which is rather circular if not absurd. How much better it is to be able to say that here is the creation that God has provided as a means of revealing himself. But it is kind of a good news/bad news piece of information. For once we get this information, what will we do with it? It’s not enough by itself.

I suppose you might say it is a little bit like having some terrible disease and seeing on television that there is a clinic somewhere that has a therapy that will cure your disease. The problem is they never give the address. No matter who you call, no matter what you do, you can never get additional information. All you know is what you saw on the television. It’s like seeing the medicine behind the glass of the pharmacy window. No matter how hard you bang, no matter how far you reach, it is always inaccessible to you.

The information about God, the knowledge of God, that comes through creation is good. It is wonderful, but it falls terribly short because it is simply intellectual knowledge and has no experiential benefit, no transforming power.

But then comes Jesus. And that of course is what the gospel, the good news, is all about. John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God” but Jesus has made him known. Or Hebrews 1:1-2, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” So God started out with nature and creation. He spoke through prophets who then passed his message along. But the apex, the best of all, is Jesus. He sent Jesus. Hebrews 1 explains that this Jesus was the one who through God the Father created the world in the first place, so there is a link. A link between God’s revelation in cre-

ation and God's revelation in Jesus. God sent his son and he is fully God, so that when we hear Jesus, we hear God. When we experience Jesus, we experience God. When we learn about Jesus, it is God that we are learning about. God has become human so that we can know him.

It is like the botanist becoming a plant. It's like the astrophysicist becoming a piece of space debris. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, became human so that we can know him. We're talking about the availability through Jesus of an eternal supernatural connection with God. Not just information at a distance, but close-up and personal and eternal.

Some Christians use the terminology of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A relationship as real, as personal, as intimate, as with any other person and even more so. But it is not with some distant person of ancient history, it is with Jesus who is alive today and is still God. We can, through faith, have a connection with him that is present and powerful; it is real and it is a means of knowing God — infinitely knowing God. Personally knowing God.

The third way in which God has revealed himself, in addition to creation and Jesus Christ, is the Bible. The Bible is God's official record of his self revelation throughout history. So the Bible explains something that we could not have otherwise experienced. That is the fact that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God did it. He made the creation. But we weren't there so he gave us a record so we would know.

God spoke audibly to Moses and gave him the 10 commandments and other great revelations about God.

But we weren't there, we weren't even alive, so we have the record in the Bible. That God sent his only son to show us who God is and

what God is like. That he was born in Bethlehem, grew to maturity and performed tremendous miracles. That he lived a perfect life. That He died on the cross to pay for human sin, that he couldn't be kept down. That he rose again to life. Except we weren't there. So we've got a record that comes from God so we would know.

Very near the end of the biography of Jesus, John wrote, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31) These things are written so that we can have eternal life. God chose to reveal himself so that we could personally know him.

Now I realize that there are some of us who say,

"As good as all that is, I wish that God would talk to me now the way he talked to people then. I mean, it is not that I don't see God in creation. It is not that I don't love Jesus Christ as my Savior or that I don't read the Bible, but there are times that I just don't know what to do. There are decisions I've got to make. I've asked God to actually talk to me out loud so that I would know for sure that it was God.

Sometimes we hear someone say, "God spoke to me." You say, "Did he talk with you out loud?" "No, he didn't say it out loud, but I'm sure it was God who actually talked to me." And sometimes those who report new revelations from God, which are not in the Bible, claim these revelations are to be obeyed as surely as if they were written in the Bible. What are we supposed to think of that? How do we deal with that?

First of all, we need to be sure that we are clear on God being the initiator. It is God who reveals himself to us. It is God who is the subject and we are the object. So let us never imagine that simply because we want to hear something, that God therefore is obligated to speak to us. When you read the accounts within the Bible of God's direct revelation to people, many times they were caught completely by surprise. There were times when they didn't even want to listen to God, as was the case with Samuel in the Old Testament. He had no idea who was talking. He had to go and ask someone else. It was God who took the initiative.

Let us be sure we understand our right place and our right relationship with God. It is God who is the revealer; it is God who is the initiator; it is the God who then gives the information to us. It is based upon God's desire to speak more than it is based upon our desire to hear.

***God chose to reveal himself so that we could personally know him. .***

Certainly it is possible for people today to hear from God, but let us never think that anything that we understand to be from God is on the same level as the revelation of God through his creation or through his Son or through his scripture. Rather, let us put it in a category where the Holy Spirit, whom the Bible teaches lives within every Christian, influences us in accordance with that connection, that knowledge, that intimacy we have with him as well as through the Bible.

We must be very clear in our understanding that we have sufficient revelation from God in what he has already given to us. We have 100% of everything we need to know for faith and practice in Jesus Christ and in the Bible. It is not as if God has left us hanging there with some shortage of information that we need.

It is also important for us to realize that anything that we perceive to be as a direct influence or direction from God for our own lives must be completely in agreement with what we have from God in the Bible. I don't mean in any way to belittle anyone, but I have had people say to me that God told me that I should do this or that. And I have said, "Wait a minute, that flat out contradicts what the Bible says." I have even had people look at me and say, "Well, I don't care what the Bible says, God told me this" —perhaps failing to realize what a dangerous statement that is. For it either implies that God contradicts himself or that the Bible is incorrect and invalid and that person has information that is superior to what God has otherwise taught. So, anything that we are convinced is in accordance with the will and the mind of God must be in accordance with the revelation of God that we already have. Martin Luther, the great reformer, spoke of *Solace Scriptura*, or "the Bible alone," "the Scripture alone" as our great authority.

All of what we have here talked about leads to the astonishing truth (and I hope that we don't miss that it is astonishing) that we can know God. It doesn't mean that we can know everything about God, for we cannot. We will never know everything about God because God is far greater than any capacity that we will ever have. But it is to say that we can personally know him. Not just about him, but we can know him. We can know God as God. We can know him as Savior. We can know him as Lord, as father, as friend.

Jesus prayed in John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." That is to say that when we know God, we live forever with him. That is when we know God as he wants to be known, and the way he wants to be known is by us believing in him. That is the faith element. That we believe God is who he presents himself to be. That we believe that we are distanced from God by both our humanity and our sinfulness and that the connection to God is through Jesus Christ who came and who died for us and who rose again from the dead. And when we in faith believe all that to be true and claim it for ourselves, it is like plugging the computer into the outlet — the connection is made! The sparks can fly. The power is there. It is then that we will know God. The believing is called faith, the connecting is called salvation and the result is eternal life.

Is this good? It is very good. But it is only the beginning. For we can spend the rest of our lives and the rest of eternity coming to know more and more and more about God and tightening the connection every moment, forever and ever. Think of how it is when you first start a new hobby or meet a person and

after a short time you think, "Wow, I've really gained a lot of information." But the more you pursue the hobby or the more you get to know the person, the more you discover what you didn't know. Getting to know God goes on and on and on. And it is more important than everything else that we would otherwise consider to be valuable in our lives!

There are some words worth memorizing in Jeremiah 9:23-24 where the Old Testament prophet 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, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord.*

The number one goal of our lives shouldn't be to get more wisdom, shouldn't be to get more wealth, shouldn't be to get greater strength. The best goal of all is to know God.

One time I was at a concert and during the intermission, across the lobby, there was a very famous national leader whom I had seen on television, but had never seen in the flesh. My host pointed this famous person out to me and said, "I know him." I said, "You're kidding! You know him?" "Yeah, I know him," he said. "Would you like me to introduce him to you?"

Now, change the place from the concert hall to here. Change the time from then to now. And change the famous person from the nationally known political and economic leader to God. You point to God and you say to me, "I know him." I say, "You're kidding! You know him? You know God?" You say to me, "Yeah. I really do. Would you like me to introduce him to you?"

God is great, God is good, God is holy, God is love and God is knowable. You can know him. Really know him — through faith in Jesus Christ.

*Faith Matters* is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
612-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
©Leith Anderson