

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

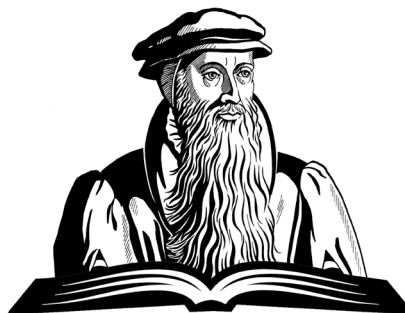
STUDY GUIDE

Module 2:

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Lecture 2:

THE NATURE, LIMITS, AND MEANS OF KNOWING GOD



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Module 2

The Doctrine of God

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- 2. The Nature, Limits, and Means of Knowing God**
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Module 2:

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Lecture 2:

The Nature, Limits, and Means of Knowing God

Introduction

Many monkeys have what is called a “prehensile” tail—that is, they have tails with which they can grasp things. In the English language, the word “comprehend” is derived from the same Latin root word. But “comprehend” means to grasp something with our mind, to lay hold of it mentally, or to know and understand it. When it comes to our knowledge of God, the Bible teaches that he is incomprehensible, which means that it is impossible for a creature to know God fully, perfectly, and completely. We begin our study of the doctrine of God by exploring the implications of God’s incomprehensibility in our knowledge of who God is.

Theme: *The nature, limits, and means of knowing God.*

I. Scriptural Basis

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.”—Job 11:7–9

1. We cannot search out the full depths of all that God is; it is impossible to know the Almighty perfectly.

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.”—Isaiah 40:28

2. Isaiah appeals to the fact that God’s people do know things about God.
3. The incomprehensibility of God.
 - a. Believers cannot know God fully, perfectly, and completely.

Questions:

1. What does the word “comprehend” mean? What does the phrase “God’s incomprehensibility” mean?

2. What are the implications of Job 11, verses 7 to 9?

3. What two things does Isaiah show us in chapter 40, verse 28? Can you find other similar passages in Scripture?

II. Doctrinal Overview

1. God is infinite—he is without limits, bounds, measures, or degrees.
2. The distinction between the Creator and the creation.
 - a. The creature cannot know God like God knows himself, nor can any man see the divine essence.
3. God’s incomprehensibility is part of his glory.
4. Because God is incomprehensible, he is also incomparable.
5. God does condescend to reveal himself to mankind.
6. Summary—We know God truly, as he reveals himself, but we can never know God exhaustively. God is an infinite and incomprehensible, incomparable Creator.

Questions:

1. What does it mean that God is infinite? Will a redeemed believer fully comprehend God in eternity?

2. Can any man see the divine essence of God? Explain your answer. What did Paul say regarding this truth?

3. Why is it said that God's incomprehensibility is part of his glory?

4. What passages of Scripture tell us that God is incomparable? Which one of the Ten Commandments is related to this truth?

5. In what ways does God condescend to reveal himself to mankind? How should we understand Scripture passages that refer to God's eyes, or ears, or arms, etc.?

III. Polemical Exposition

Objection 1: *"I cannot know God."*

Objection 2: *"I can know God perfectly as God knows himself."*

Objection 3: *"We can know God, but it is not that important to us. There are all sorts of things that are important, like how we live, what we do, how we think, the practicalities of daily life, and so on. But thinking about who God is and the whole pursuit of the knowledge of God, well, that's not something that is so significant."*

Questions:

1. What are the problems with Objection #1, of not being able to know God? What are the ways God gave us to know him and to have communion with him?

2. How do you answer Objection #2? Why is it a great danger for man to lift himself up to the level of God himself?

3. Which of the Lord Jesus' words can best answer Objection #3? How does the Lord define eternal life?

IV. Practical Exposition

1. The study of the knowledge of God must lead to humility.
2. The evil of sin is defined by who we sin against.
3. We must come to treasure the Lord and all that we know about him above everything else.
4. We should study the doctrine of God with frequent and fervent prayer.
5. Never allow the study of God to become merely an intellectual exercise.

Questions:

1. Rev. McCurley says, "pride reflects an absence of true knowledge, not a high attainment of that knowledge." What does he mean by this? What should our study of God do for us?

2. What is a good way to define the evil of sin? Who are we really sinning against?

3. What is the main thing that David pursues in Psalm 27? What is the main thing you seek after?

4. What other things should we bear in mind when studying the doctrine of God? Is it merely an intellectual exercise?

V. Self-Reflection

Studying the doctrine of God should always be combined with deep affection toward God. The book of Psalms provides us with precious examples of the combination and consistency between the knowledge of God and true piety, humility, and pious affection. Meditate as you read the Psalms and pray for that consistency in your own life.