

# How Can We “Know” God?

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The modern theologian places emphasis upon "existential man" rather than upon a pre-existent, personal God; and would say that man can know of God only via his inner responses to God-concepts. To many these "concepts" are but developments of civilization, fruits of soul-searching on the part of our prehistoric ancestors as they groped for an explanation of the unknown. The modern theologian knows God in his "heart" — through transcendental meditations or the like. He reasons that God is not subject to man's five senses, and therefore can not be "known" as one might know of material things.

There is an element of truth in the above. God is Spirit, and cannot be adequately represented by things material (**Jn. 4:24 Ex. 20:4 Acts 17:24**). We do the idea of God an injustice when we "place" Him literally on some celestial cloud — a stately old gentleman with long beard. But we must reject Karl Barth's statement, "— we are not thinking of some being existing in self-contained form prior to his revelation to man. God is identical with his revelation." God, worthy of the "God-concept," must have existed prior to the revelation of Himself, being eternal in nature (**Jn. 17:5, 24**). What true God must be created by the imagination of his creatures? With such a basis there is nothing left for us but the subjective speculation of men — making themselves the laboratory, the manual, and the final judge of the experiment.

We believe the Bible provides man with an objective approach to God. Before you "turn us off" give the idea a fair examination. What does it offer? What may one expect from an objective study of the Bible? May we expect to fathom the true essence of Deity; to appreciate, via translation into human experience, the true nature of God? This is impossible, for man has no experience comparable with immortality, no basis for understanding such things. If God had, somehow, expressed the actual glories of Himself, as "known" by Himself, these glories would remain hidden from man for we lack the capacity to appreciate them. But the Bible is filled with "anthropomorphisms," a Greek compound meaning "human in form." Attributes of God are expressed in "man form" so we can grasp them.

God is Spirit, but He "*walked in the garden*" in the cool of the day (**Gen. 3:8**). "*No man has seen God at any time*" (**1 Jn. 4:12**), for He is wholly immortal (**1 Tim. 6:16**) yet Moses talked with Him "*face to face*" (i.e., *directly*, rather than through a prophet; — and "*thou shalt see my back*" (**Ex. 33:11, 18-23**). Moses saw something *less* than the full "*glory*" of the Lord (v. 18), but enough that this glory was reflected upon his face (**34:29-35**). Heaven has gates of pearl and street of gold because man thinks "value" in these terms.

Yes, the idea of God "transcends" material things, and a transcendental operation is essential if we are to know Him. But man does not do the transcending. *God* crossed the

gulf —the gap between deity and humanity — and revealed Himself and His will for man in terms and means of communication suited to His creatures.

The Holy Spirit is the "revealer" of deity (**1 Cor. 2:10**), and Peter says *"The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"* (**2 Pet. 1:21**). And Jesus said, *"I have yet many things to say unto you (Apostles - RT) but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth..."* (**Jn. 16:12ff.**). God expressed His will *"in (words) which the Holy Spirit teaches"* (**1 Cor. 2:13**) so men can understand (**Eph 3:1-6**).

And the long history of God's revelation of Himself to man reaches its apex in one who has the Spirit without limitations (**Jn. 3:34**). John wrote *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"* (**Jn. 1:18**). With the coming of Jesus, Deity put on flesh and dwelt among men. *"In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."* (**Col. 2:9**) In the Son of God incarnate the love of God, the power of God; the compassion, light, truth, holiness — the very essence of God — is translated into a demonstration that can be understood by sinful men.

Jesus once said, *"If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also...."* and when Philip said, *"Show us the Father"* Jesus replied, *"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (**Jn. 14:7ff.**). To the extent we "see" (perceive, know) Jesus Christ, we "know" God. The thoughtful student should begin to recognize a "pattern of revelation" in all these things. Time and space bound men cannot "know" God as they know material matters; but God has revealed Himself in marvelous fashion, and "knowing God" takes on a new significance. Man need not, nor can he "ascend into heaven" or "descend into the deep" to find God. He is near every one of us in the word of faith which His messengers have proclaimed (**Rom. 10:6-17**). And as we trust Him, and live the kind of life to which He calls us, we begin to "know" God in a way that affects our very character. John wrote, *"Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him"* (**1 Jn. 2:3-5**). Jesus said, *"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"* (**Jn. 14:23**).

Sin separates man from God, and pride blinds man to his true condition. In his vanity he would bring God down to his own level, or presume to "transcend" into God's level. We will ever remain ignorant of God if we follow this course. But God will be God despite man's failures. He has loved us *"while we were yet sinners"* (**Rom. 5:6-11**), and through the ultimate "revelation" of Himself in Jesus Christ, has made it possible for us to know and be known. The good news concerning Christ, and the whole of His message to us, is available to all who will prayerfully consider the inspired word of God. The Bible is the God-given window into heaven.