

The Incomprehensibility of God

The God We Can Truly Know but Never Fully Comprehend

A Teaching Lesson · Seminary-level content, high-school-level clarity

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Big Idea: God is incomprehensible — He is so great that no created mind can ever fully understand Him. We can know Him truly and really, but never completely. What we know of God is true; it is simply never the whole of Him. This is not bad news; it means there is always more of God to enjoy forever.

Memory Verse: *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” — Romans 11:33 (ESV)*

Contents

PART ONE

Teaching Outline (Leader Notes)

The incomprehensibility of God is the truth that God is so infinitely great that no finite mind can ever fully understand Him. This is the capstone of everything we have studied about God's greatness: because He is infinite, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, and far above us, He can never be completely grasped by creatures. But this lesson must be taught carefully, because it is easy to misunderstand. Incomprehensible does NOT mean unknowable. God has truly revealed Himself, and what He reveals is real and reliable. We simply never reach the bottom of Him. Part One is your full teaching material; Part Two is a handout to copy for students.

I. Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Define incomprehensibility in their own words.
2. Explain the crucial difference between "unknowable" and "not fully knowable."
3. Give at least two Bible passages that teach it.
4. Explain how we can be sure our knowledge of God is still true.
5. Describe why this truth leads to worship rather than despair.

II. What Do We Mean by "Incomprehensible"?

Incomprehensible does not mean "confusing" or "impossible to understand at all." In theology it means God cannot be *comprehended* — that is, He cannot be completely grasped or fully wrapped up in our understanding. A child can truly know his father without understanding everything about him. In the same way, we truly know God, but our knowledge never contains all of Him. He is always infinitely more than we can hold.

The most important distinction in the lesson

Teach these three words carefully — they keep students from two opposite errors:

Knowable	God CAN be truly known, because He has revealed Himself (John 17:3). This is real, saving knowledge.
Incomprehensible	God cannot be FULLY known. No creature will ever exhaust or master Him (Job 11:7).
Not unknowable	This is the error to avoid. God is not hidden or unreachable. What we know is true and enough to save and satisfy us.

The balance to teach: We know God truly, but not exhaustively; really, but not fully. Everything He tells us is accurate — there is just always infinitely more.

III. What the Bible Says

“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven — what can you do?”

— Job 11:7–8 (ESV)

- **Romans 11:33–34** — God’s judgments are “unsearchable” and His ways “inscrutable”; who has known His mind?
- **Isaiah 55:8–9** — “My thoughts are not your thoughts”; God’s ways are as far above ours as the heavens above the earth.
- **Psalms 145:3** — “His greatness is unsearchable.” It has no end for us to reach.
- **Psalms 139:6** — “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.”
- **1 Corinthians 13:12** — Now we “know in part”; one day we will know more fully — but even then, the finite will never exhaust the infinite.

IV. The Key Nuance: How Can We Trust What We Know?

Students may worry: “If I can never fully understand God, how do I know anything I believe about Him is right?” This is the most important question to answer, and the answer is solid.

1. **God has revealed Himself on purpose.** We are not guessing about God. He has told us who He is in His Word and in His Son (Deuteronomy 29:29; John 1:18).
2. **What He reveals is completely true.** A true map of part of a mountain is still true, even if it does not show the whole range. Our knowledge is partial, but it is not wrong.
3. **God speaks in ways we can understand.** He stoops down to our level (what theologians call “accommodation”), like a parent using simple words with a child — simple, but not false.

The crucial point: Partial knowledge is not false knowledge. We know God truly even though we do not know Him totally. What He has revealed is enough to trust, to love, and to be saved.

V. Common Confusions (and How to Answer Them)

“Doesn’t the Bible say we WILL know God fully in heaven?”

In heaven our knowledge of God will be vastly greater, purer, and free of sin’s blindness (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2). But even glorified saints will remain finite creatures, and God will remain infinite. We will know Him more and more forever — an endless, joyful exploration — but a finite mind can never fully contain an infinite God. Heaven is not the end of learning God; it is the beginning of knowing Him without limit of time.

“If God is beyond understanding, why study theology at all?”

Because incomprehensible does not mean unknowable. We study exactly because there is so much true treasure to find. A person could study the ocean for a lifetime and never reach its floor — that is a reason to keep diving, not to give up. The vastness of God is an invitation, not a locked door.

“Can I just believe whatever I want about God, since no one fully knows?”

No. This is the danger to guard against. Incomprehensibility never gives us freedom to make God into whatever we like. God has clearly revealed His truth, and we are bound to it. Our not knowing everything is never an excuse to ignore what He has plainly said.

VI. What the Church Has Taught

- **Augustine** wrote, “If you have understood, then what you have understood is not God.” Anything small enough for us to fully grasp would not be the true God.
- **John Chrysostom** preached a famous series on God’s incomprehensibility, warning against those who claimed to know God as fully as God knows Himself.
- **John Calvin** taught that God “accommodates” His revelation to our small capacity, so that the incomprehensible God can be truly, if not fully, known.

The phrase to memorize: **We know God truly, but never totally — and that is cause for endless worship.**

VII. The One-Sentence Guardrail

God can be truly known but never fully comprehended — our knowledge of Him is real and reliable, but never complete. Incomprehensible does not mean unknowable.

VIII. Why This Matters for Us

- **It keeps us humble.** We approach God as small creatures before an infinite God — with reverence, not with pride that thinks it has God “figured out.”
- **It leads to worship, not despair.** Paul responds to God’s unsearchable ways not with frustration but with praise (Romans 11:33–36). Mystery draws the humble heart to adore.
- **It gives us peace in what we don’t understand.** When God’s ways are hard to follow, we remember His thoughts are higher than ours — and we can trust Him where we cannot trace Him.
- **It promises endless joy.** Because God is inexhaustible, knowing Him will never grow boring. There is always more of God to discover and delight in — forever.

PART TWO

Student Handout

The Incomprehensibility of God. Fill in the blanks and follow along as we work through the lesson together.

The Big Idea

God is so great that no created mind can ever fully understand Him. We can know Him truly, but never completely. What we know is true; it is just never all of Him — which means there is always more of God to enjoy forever.

A Word to Know

- **Incomprehensible** — not “confusing” or “unknowable,” but “cannot be fully grasped.” God is always infinitely more than we can hold.

Three Words That Keep Us Straight

Knowable	God CAN be truly known (John 17:3).
Incomprehensible	God cannot be FULLY known (Job 11:7).
NOT unknowable	What we know is true and enough to save us.

Key Verses

- **Romans 11:33** — “How unsearchable are his judgments!”
- **Isaiah 55:9** — “My thoughts are not your thoughts.”
- **Psalms 145:3** — “His greatness is unsearchable.”
- **1 Corinthians 13:12** — Now we “know in part.”

Two Pictures to Remember

- **A true map of part of a mountain** is still true, even if it doesn’t show the whole range. Our knowledge is partial, not wrong.
- **The ocean** — you could study it your whole life and never reach the floor. That’s a reason to keep diving, not to give up.

Fill in the Blanks

1. “How _____ are his judgments!” (Romans 11:33)
2. “My thoughts are not your _____.” (Isaiah 55:8)
3. Incomprehensible means God cannot be _____ known — not that He is unknowable.

4. We know God _____, but never totally.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it actually good news that we can never fully “figure God out”?
2. How can partial knowledge of God still be completely true?
3. How should this truth change the way we come to God in worship?
4. When God’s ways don’t make sense to you, how does this lesson help?

One Sentence to Remember

We can trust Him where we cannot trace Him.

This Week

Memorize Romans 11:33. When you meet something about God or His ways you cannot understand this week, instead of getting frustrated, turn it into praise: “Lord, You are greater than my mind. I trust You even here.”

Sources & Further Study

Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV). Key passages and classic sources referenced in this lesson:

- Scripture: Deuteronomy 29:29; Job 11:7–8; Psalm 139:6; Psalm 145:3; Isaiah 55:8–9; John 1:18; John 17:3; Romans 11:33–36; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2.
- Augustine, Sermons and On the Trinity (“if you have understood, it is not God”).
- John Chrysostom, On the Incomprehensible Nature of God (homilies).
- John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion I.13 (accommodation and true-but-partial knowledge of God).
- For modern treatment: Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics vol. 2; A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy; Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God.