

7

The Omniscience of God

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

When reflecting on the limited capacity of the human mind, it is difficult to fathom a being who knows everything perfectly. There are some today who would limit God's knowledge, arguing that it interferes with the free choices of individuals, but this runs counter to the clear and consistent teaching of Scripture. In this message, Dr. Lawson considers what it means to affirm that God is omniscient and why this aspect of His character is essential to our understanding of who He is.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 46:8–10; Romans 11:33–36

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To consider the height, depth, length, and breadth of God's omniscience
2. To explain how God's exhaustive knowledge ought to both comfort and convict
3. To impart humility in light of God's limitless understanding

QUOTATIONS

In public, in private; [God] knows all cases, and he knows all remedies; he knows the seasons of bringing them, and he knows the seasons of removing them, for his own glory. What is contingent in respect of us, and of our foreknowledge, and in respect of second causes, is not so in regard of God's . . . he knows all causes in themselves, and, therefore, knows what every cause will produce, what will be the event of every counsel and of every action.

—Stephen Charnock

Lord, how terrible is Thine omniscience for Thine enemies. That eye which burns in heaven as a flame of fire is always upon them. They would fain flee away from it, but they are never able. But for Thy people, Thine omniscience is a comfort and a refuge. Thou art He who can help them against themselves and the deceitfulness of their own hearts. They invite Thine omniscience to search their heart and to cleanse them from their secret faults.

—Andrew Murray

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. Perfect Self-Knowledge

- A. God's omniscience includes perfect knowledge of Himself, the triune Godhead.
- B. The three persons of the Trinity know each other fully, with no gaps in their knowledge (Matt. 11:27; John 10:15).
- C. Though no human can fathom the thoughts of God, He knows them completely (1 Cor. 2:11).

II. Perfect Knowledge

- A. God knows all things as they truly are.
 - i. God never learns anything new.
 - ii. Nothing ever surprises God or takes Him off guard.
 - iii. God is not prone to confusion or misunderstanding.
- B. There is no darkness in God's knowledge (1 John 1:5).
- C. When we bring our petitions and requests before God, we know that His responses are grounded in His all-encompassing knowledge.

III. Eternal Knowledge

- A. Human knowledge is gained through a succession of experiences.
- B. Humans can forget what they know.
- C. God, on the other hand, has known all things from before the foundation of the world, and this knowledge remains intact forever (Isa. 46:8-10).
- D. God not only knows the outcome of history, but He is also familiar with every human thought and action throughout history.

IV. Immediate Knowledge

- A. God knows all things instantly and simultaneously.
- B. God has never needed anyone to instruct or counsel Him (Rom. 11:34; Isa. 40:13-14).

V. Exhaustive Knowledge

- A. God's knowledge encompasses minute details.
 - i. He numbers and names the stars (Ps. 147:4).
 - ii. He counts the hairs on a person's head, and not even a sparrow falls apart from the Lord's knowledge (Matt. 10:29-30).

- B. God knows unseen details about our lives, and there is nothing that we can hide from Him.

VI. Penetrating Knowledge

- A. God's knowledge penetrates the depths of the human heart.
- B. He knows us far more intimately than we know ourselves (Ps. 139:1-4).
- C. Even though God is fully acquainted with the depths of our sin and depravity, He does not withhold His love and forgiveness from us.

VII. Future Knowledge

- A. God knows the future because He has foreordained whatever shall come to pass.
- B. God's knowledge of future events sets Him apart from lifeless idols.

VIII. Possible Knowledge

- A. God knows not only the reality of what is, but also the possibility of other things that might have been.
- B. He is aware of the potential consequences of every possible human action that ever could have been taken (Matt. 11:21, 23).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Since Luke states that Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), we can infer that God is always increasing in knowledge.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. God's "immediate knowledge" primarily refers to _____.
 - a. His simultaneous knowledge of everything
 - b. His knowledge specifically in the present
 - c. His knowledge of the thoughts of individuals
 - d. His knowledge of the future
3. Concerning God's omniscience, which of the following statements is false?
 - a. Since God knows everything, humans can't be responsible for their own actions.
 - b. God's knowledge includes the past, present, and future.
 - c. Humans are dependent upon God for true knowledge of Him.
 - d. The fall of mankind in Genesis 3 did not surprise God.
4. God knows us even better than we know ourselves.
 - a. True
 - b. False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How should the fact that only God has perfect self-knowledge influence how we come to know Him? Can we come to know Him through our own effort?
2. Dr. Lawson stresses that nothing ever catches God off guard. How does this bring relief to Christians in difficult circumstances? Does the fact that He knows everything provide comfort by itself, or does comfort come from considering His knowledge together with other attributes?
3. Since God knows ahead of time what will be asked of Him in prayer, what is accomplished by praying?
4. Dr. Lawson states that God's exhaustive knowledge is both comforting and convicting. In what way is it comforting? In what way is it convicting?