

King's Online Bible School

Doctrine 101: Learning about God — Spotlight Studies

(adapted from Wayne Grudem's Bible Doctrines and R. C. Sproul's Essential Truths)

God Is Omniscient (Lesson 7)

1. Perfect Knowledge Revealed

"The firmament is proclaiming His handiwork" (Ps 19:1). Creation declares God's perfect knowledge.

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (Rom 1:26).

The created universe is the finite expression of an infinite God. It is possible and wonderful because, first of all, God knows *Himself* perfectly.

a. God knows Himself perfectly

Because God is an infinite being, what there is to know about Him is infinite as well. His knowledge and His nature complement each other exactly. His knowledge of Himself is without limit and complete. "God's knowledge is His essence knowing. It is one eternal, all-comprehensive, indivisible act" (Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 144).

"For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:10-11).

b. God expresses Himself perfectly

The world is firmly established because it is the expression of God's infinite knowing, His wisdom and His perfect understanding. He instinctively knows the highest goals and the ideal means to attain those goals.

"The Lord by wisdom founded the earth,
By understanding He established the heavens" (Prov 3:19).

"God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Gen 1:31).

Because God's knowledge of Himself is complete and eternal, it is *immutable* (unchanging). He does not change and it does not change. "He, remaining Himself unmoved, moves all things, and so perceives all the various changes of things, by one immutable act of cognition" (Hodge, 145). This is an essential basis for God's absolute trustworthiness as Lord of Creation.

"Let them praise the name of the Lord,
For He commanded and they were created.
He has also established them forever and ever;
He has made a decree which will not pass away" (Ps 148:5-6).

2. Giver of Wisdom

"Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule . . ." (Gen 1:26).

"Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7).

"But it is a spirit in man.
And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8).

Nowhere in His physical creation are the wonders of God's wisdom so clearly reflected as in the complex cognitive abilities He has created in man — enabling him to receive through his senses, to learn, to know, to reason, to arrive at understanding, to apply knowledge, to communicate articulately, to imagine, and to design and create and invent.

"Who has put wisdom in the innermost being
Or given understanding to the mind?" (Job 38:36)

Even when Adam and all his sons and daughters turned from God's perfect wisdom to our own independent deciding, God did not abandon His determination that men, created in His image, should function and rule in this world for His glory and for their good. He enables every child to know and to learn. He causes men to discover and unlock the properties and powers of His physical creation. He inspires gifts of expression, beauty, insight, and government.

"Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever,
For wisdom and power belong to Him. . . .
He removes kings and establishes kings;
He gives wisdom to wise men
And knowledge to men of understanding.
It is He Who reveals the profound and hidden things" (Dan 2:20-22).

"I (Wisdom) am understanding, power is mine.
By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.
By me princes rule, and nobles,
All who judge rightly" (Prov 8:14-16).

But God created man for Himself, first of all. So we are not only physical and rational creatures, but also spiritual beings. As those made in His image, not only are we endowed with the physical and mental abilities we possess, but also with immaterial spirits. We are made to experience and interact in the immaterial, spiritual realm of existence. God created us to know and relate to Him.

"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1).

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10).

"For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright,
Guarding the paths of justice;
And He preserves the way of His godly ones" (Prov 2:6-8).

" . . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph 1:17).

" . . . that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10).

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting" (Jms 1:5-6).

"For the Lord will give you understanding in everything" (2 Tim 2:7).

3. God's Knowing and Ours

"His understanding is inscrutable (impossible to understand)" (Isa 40:28).

God's mode (way) of knowing is different than the way we know. We come to know things incompletely, but adequately, through our senses and by the powers of imagining and reasoning with which He has created us.

God knows all things *intuitively* (discerning all things directly in His own light). His knowing is *essential*, not *relative*; *i.e.*, "He knows all things directly in their hidden essences, while we know them only by their properties, as they stand related to our senses" (Hodge, 145).

He knows His creation and every created thing as intimately and completely in its essence as He knows Himself. His knowledge is His essence knowing.

"In Him we . . . have our being" (Acts 17:28).

God's knowing is *independent* — "it does not depend on His observing or studying His creatures, but solely upon His own infinite intuition of all things possible in the light of His own reason, and of all things actual and future in the light of His own eternal purpose" (Hodge, 144).

"To Him belong counsel and understanding" (Job 12:13).

"He is mighty in strength of understanding" (Job 36:5).

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom 11:33).

God's knowing is *immediate*. This is different than our knowing in three ways: (1) We always arrive at what we know gradually, through observation and our reasoning processes. (2) We do not have the capacity to retain all that we come to know. (3) "We know the present imperfectly, remember the past dimly, and the future we know not at all" (Hodge, 145).

God's knowing all things past, present, and future is eternal and simultaneous, comprehending everything in one timeless act of the divine mind" (Strong's *Systematic Theology*, 283). He beholds each creature and thing in itself, its relations, and the entire course of its existence, conditions, and experiences as ever present (Hodge, 145).

"God is greater than our hearts and knows all things" (1 John 3:20).

His knowledge never becomes more complete. He does not have to reason or ponder. He never has to arrive at a conclusion. All His options and decisions and all other persons' options and decisions He has known forever.

He always knows the end from the beginning. He never has to learn anything. There are no new facts for God to accumulate. He has always known them all.

The definition of *omniscience* states that God knows everything in one simple and eternal act. The word *simple* here is being used in the sense that His knowing is all one. It is not partial like ours is.

"His understanding is infinite" (Ps 147:5).

He does not just think about a few things some times and then about other matters at other times, nor does He consider anything in a partial matter. He focuses on every aspect of everything simultaneously. He is always fully aware and mindful of everything. None of His knowing is ever in the background or buried in non-conscious memory.

God's knowing is *distinct* and *perfect*. It is free from all vagueness or any confusion. His knowledge is true, corresponding perfectly to the reality of all things (Strong, 283).

The Lord's declaration to Job calls us to realize how full, deep, and complete His knowledge is.

"Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds,
The wonders of One perfect in knowledge?" (Job 37:16)

"In Whom (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3).

4. By Wisdom He Rules

a. God's ways in the affairs of the world are perfect, being informed by His complete knowledge of all things "actual" and "possible."

Jesus declares how detailed God's knowledge is:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt 10:29-30).

God knows all things that are merely "possible," that might happen but do not actually come to pass.

In a remarkably detailed prophecy of the future conflicts between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, the Lord includes these revelations:

"As for both kings, their hearts will be intent on evil, and they will speak lies to each other at the same table, but it will not succeed, for the end is still to come at the appointed time" (Daniel 11:27).

"At the appointed time he will return and come into the South, but this time it will not turn out the way it did before" (Daniel 11:29).

Jesus knew that Tyre and Sidon would have repented if Jesus' miracles had been done there (Matt 11:21).

In speaking of the tribulation to come, He says,

"Then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved, but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short" (Matt 24:21-22).

b. God's perfect knowledge of all things enables and requires His control and rule over all He has made. Because He is good, it is impossible for Him to know all without controlling all.

"The lot is cast into the lap,
But its every decision is from the Lord" (Prov 16:33).

"The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations;
He frustrates the plans of the peoples.
The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
The plans of His heart from generation to generation" (Ps 33:10-11).

"From heaven the Lord looks down;
He sees all the sons of men.
From His dwelling place He gazes
On all the inhabitants of the earth,
He Who fashions the hearts of them all
And makes all their deeds understood."

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,
On those who hope for His lovingkindness . . ." (Ps 33:13-18).

"The king's heart is channels of water in the hand of the Lord;
He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov 21:1).

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"I, Yahweh, am the Maker of all things, . . .
Causing the omens of boasters to fail,
Making fools out of the diviners,
Causing wise men to draw back
And turning their knowledge into foolishness,
Confirming the word of His servant
And performing the purpose of His messengers" (Isa 44:24-26).

"Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. . . . Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem . . . in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:1, 4-7).

"This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:22-23).

"But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood, for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:7-8).

"For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled" (Rev 17:17).

5. God Knows You

Our security and peace is in the fact that there is a Source of complete and accurate knowledge of each of us. Those who acknowledge their incomplete, compromised knowing reach out to this reassurance.

"Who can discern his errors?
From what is hidden, acquit me" (Ps 19:12).

"Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

God knows.

"For His eyes are upon the ways of a man,
And He sees all his steps. . . .
For He does not need to consider a man further,
That he should go before God in judgment" (Job 34:21, 23).

"O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You understand my thought from afar.
You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O Lord, You know it all" (Psalm 139:1-4).

"The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do" (Heb 4:12-13).

God has always known you and everything about you intimately. He has always been completely aware of all your thoughts and of all your thoughts to come. He knows all your imaginations, your longings, your fantasies, your passions, your impulses, and your reactions. He knows what you will say next. He knows why you will say each thing, your motive in saying it, and the difference between your words and what is really in your heart. He discerns your attitudes, your reasoning, and your rationalizing. He weighs your judgments and your partiality. He looks upon your pride, your disdain, your disregard, and your compromising.

His awareness of you is total and constant. He knows your struggles, your fears, your hurts, your guilt, your pain, your failures, the deep wounds you carry in your soul. He hears your cries, your sighing too deep for words. He remembers and collects all your tears. He is God, the all-knowing One.

When we consider redemption and creation together, God's wisdom according to His knowledge is even more astounding.

He created us to be able to receive wisdom by actually receiving this Person into our lives. He created us with the capacity to be born of His eternal seed, receive a new nature, and still be ourselves. He created us so that we would be able to become His sanctuaries without violating His holiness, even while we are still sinners. He created us with natural, mortal bodies that He will transform into immortal, spiritual bodies.

All God's promises and assurances to us are established in His perfect knowledge and wisdom, His absolute power, and His sovereign rule.

"We know that all things work together to good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose" (Rom 8:28).