

Divine Omniscience: Does God Know Everything?

OMNISCIENT means "all-knowing." Scripture declares that God's eyes run everywhere (Job 24:23; Psa 33:13-15, 139:13-16; Pr 15:3; Jer 16:17; Heb 4:13). He searches all hearts and observes everyone's ways (1Sa 16:7; 1Ki 8:39; 1Ch 28:9; Ps 139:1-6,23; Jer 17:10; Lk 16:15; Ro 8:27; Rev 2:23). In other words, he knows everything all of the time. He knows the future no less than the past and the present, and possible events that never happen no less than the actual events that do (1Sa 23:9-13; 2Ki 13:19; Ps 81:14-15; Isa 48:18-19). He does not have to acquire information; all his knowledge is immediately and directly before his mind. The authors of the Bible stood in awe of the capacity of God's mind (Pss 139:1-6; 147:5; Isa 40:13-14,28; cf. Ro 11:33-36).

As God interacted with human beings in Scripture, he often referred to his own knowledge in ways that made it possible for his creatures to understand him and react to him. He asked questions (e.g., "Where are you?" [Ge 3:8-9]; "Where is your brother [Ge 4:9]), remembered (Ge 9:16), tested the faith of his people (Ge 22:1; Dt 8:2) and expressed regret over the outcomes of events (Ge 6:6). In these situations God already knew all things, even before they took place. Yet, as God related to human beings with their weakness and humility, he often stooped low and spoke of himself in human terms. He taught, led and congratulated human beings by referring to his own involvement in history in ways they could understand. Never once, however, was God actually ignorant of even the smallest detail.

Some theologians have denied God's omniscience on the basis that Jesus Christ, who was both God and man, claimed not to know certain things. As a man, Jesus increased in wisdom (Lk 2:52) and even expressed ignorance on one occasion (Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32). But he also possessed supernatural knowledge (Mt 9:4; 12:25; Lk 5:22; 6:8; 11:17; Jn 16:30; 21:17). In his divine nature Jesus is omniscient, but in his human nature he knows only what he has learned (see notes on Mt 24:36 and Mk 13:32 and theological article "Jesus Christ, God and Man" at

Jn 1).

God's knowledge is linked with his sovereignty. He knows each fact, thought and possibility, each individual, animal, plant and inanimate object, both in itself and in relation to all others, because he created them, sustains them and makes them function every moment according to his plan (Eph 1:11; see theological article "Providence" at Jer 18). For believers God's omniscience brings the assurance that God will not forget us but will work out good results for us according to his promises (Isa 40:27-31, Ro 8:28). To unbelievers, however, the truth of God's universal knowledge must bring dread, for it comes as a reminder that they cannot hide from his impending judgment (Pss 94:1-11; 139:7-12; *Jn* 1:1-12).

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