

Topic 13. The Omniscience of God

“His understanding is infinite” (Ps. 147:5); “the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom. 11:33); “only wise God” (Rom. 16:27)

Section 8. God’s Faculty

Introduction to Section 8: In this section we consider how *metaphysical faculty*, a third essential characteristic of spiritual beings, pertains to the Supreme Spirit. Webster defines *metaphysical* as, “of or relating to the transcendent or supersensible,” or as, “supernatural.”¹ It defines “*faculty*” as, “an inherent capability, power, or function.”² Thus, a *metaphysical faculty*, is “an inherent capability or power that relates to the supersensible or spiritual.” What *metaphysical faculties* pertain to spiritual beings? We cannot discern spirits with our senses. Yet spirits have inherent capability to think, choose, and feel. Further, although the whole soul thinks, chooses, and feels, nonetheless, Scripture uses distinct terminology for these various spiritual capabilities. The capacity to think is “the mind,” to choose is “the will,” and to feel is the “affections.”

In Unit 1 we consider God’s infinite mind, the *omniscience* of God. In Unit 2 we expound his unlimited will, the *sovereignty* of God. In Unit 3 we unfold the biblical testimony to his absolute affections, the *emotivity* of God. In one respect, each faculty is “communicable,” in another, “incommunicable.” Human spirits have the capacity to think, choose, and feel. Yet, no human being has omniscience, or a sovereign will, or divine emotivity. Thus, to use that venerable distinction as my organizing principle, I would first have to consider the biblical witness to God’s communicable mind, will, and affection, then to his incommunicable omniscience, sovereignty, and emotivity. This would not be very practical.

Hodge and Gill recognize that these faculties of mind, will, and affection characterize spiritual beings:

As power of some kind belongs to every substance, *the power which belongs to spirit, to the substance itself, is that of thought, feeling, and volition.* We are not more certain that we exist, than that we think, feel, and will. We know ourselves only as thus thinking, feeling, and willing, and we therefore are sure that *these powers or faculties are the essential attributes of a spirit, and must belong to every spirit . . .* As all this is involved in our consciousness of ourselves as spirit, it must all be true of God, or, God is of a lower order of being than man It need hardly be remarked that the Scriptures everywhere represent God as possessing all the above-mentioned attributes of a spirit. On this foundation all religion rests; all intercourse with God, all worship, all prayer, all confidence in God as preserver, benefactor, and redeemer.³ [emphasis supplied]

But as God is defined a Spirit in Scripture, as has been observed, I shall endeavor to sort the perfections and attributes of God in agreement with that . . . *with respect to it* [his nature] as active, and operative, the life of God, and his omnipotence: and *with respect to the faculties*, as a rational spirit, particularly *the understanding*, to which may belong his omniscience, and manifold wisdom; *and the will*, under which may be considered the acts of that, and the sovereignty of it; *and the affections*, to which may be reduced, the love, grace, mercy, hatred, anger, patience, and longsuffering of God: *and lastly, under the notions of qualities and virtues*, may be considered, his goodness, holiness, justice, truth, and faithfulness; *and, as a compliment to the whole*, his perfection or all-sufficiency, glory, and blessedness.⁴ [emphasis supplied]

I proceed to consider such perfections which may be ascribed to him as an intelligent Spirit; to which rational spirits, endowed with understanding, will, and affections bear some similarity. God is said to have a mind and understanding Having considered the attributes of God which belong to his understanding, as an intelligent Spirit, his knowledge and wisdom, I now proceed to consider his Will, and the sovereignty of it Next to the attributes which belong to God, as an intelligent Spirit, to his understanding and will, may be considered, those which may be called Affections Having considered those attributes which bear a likeness to affections in men, I proceed to consider those which in them may be called virtues; as holiness, justice, or righteousness, truth, or faithfulness⁵

¹ WNC Dictionary, 716

² Ibid., 407

³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:378, 379, 380

⁴ John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 51

⁵ Ibid., 84, 101, 112, 148

Unit 1. God's Supreme Mind: *The Omniscience of God*

The term “omniscience” comes from the Latin, “scientia,” “knowledge,” and “omni,” “all.” Thus, omniscience describes God as *All-Knowing*. Scripture presents God's supreme mind with a rich variety of terms and expressions. It affirms that God's mind, knowledge, and wisdom are incomprehensible.⁶ It features its *essential nature*,⁷ *conspicuous display*,⁸ and practical and religious *relevance*.⁹ I expound omniscience accordingly.

I. *The Essential Nature of Omniscience*

In order to explain the essential nature of omniscience, I first, define the *concept* of omniscience, second, delineate its distinguishing *characteristics*, and third, discover its underlying *causes*.

A. *The Concept of Omniscience*

What is divine omniscience? Scripture discloses three essential features of omniscience: God's supreme mind, knowledge, and wisdom.¹⁰ The *fountain* of omniscience is God's supreme mind, which is his faculty of comprehension and perception. The psalmist extols the *fulcrum* of omniscience, God's infinite knowledge¹¹ and understanding.¹² The apostle extols the *fruition* of omniscience, God's supreme wisdom.¹³ Wisdom presupposes knowledge and surpasses it. It is the apex of omniscience. Thus Hodge observes: “Wisdom and knowledge are intimately related. The former [wisdom] is manifested in the selection of proper ends, and of proper means for the accomplishment of those ends.”¹⁴ Thus, I offer the following definition. God's *omniscience* is:

God's supreme capacity to comprehend and perceive, by which he knows all things divine, possible, actual, and historical; and, by which he has supreme capability to use what he knows to devise and accomplish his plans.

1. *The fountain of omniscience: God's mind*: “God's supreme capacity to comprehend and perceive”

God is a rational being who thinks supremely.¹⁵ He is also an intelligent being, who understands supremely.¹⁶ God's understanding involves total comprehension of everything that exists¹⁷ and universal perception of everything that happens.¹⁸ God always possessed this capacity to comprehend and perceive, by which he has both knowledge and wisdom.

2. *The fulcrum of omniscience: God's knowledge*: “he knows all things divine, possible, actual, and historical”

God's supreme knowledge is the hub of omniscience. It cements the concept together. The name, “All-Knowing,” confirms this. First, God knows “all things divine.” When only God was, he had total self-

⁶ Ps. 139:4,6; Isa. 40:28, 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-34

⁷ Job 37:16; Ps. 147:5; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 11:33-34, 16:27

⁸ Job 37:16; Rom. 11:33-34

⁹ Job 37:16; John 21:17; Rom. 16:27

¹⁰ Rom. 11:33-34: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been his counselor?

¹¹ Ps. 139:4, 6: there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Jehovah, you know it altogether . . . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

¹² Ps. 147:5: Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; his understanding is infinite.

¹³ Rom. 16:27: to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever. Amen.

¹⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:401

¹⁵ Isa. 55:8-9: my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁶ Isa. 40:28: The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary, there is no searching of his understanding.

¹⁷ John 21:17: Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.

¹⁸ Heb. 4:13: And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

comprehension and perfect self-perception.¹⁹ Again, God knew in advance, “foreknew,” everything that could exist or happen, “all things possible.”²⁰ Again, God in his decree determined, and thus foreknew, everything that would exist and happen, “all things actual and historical.”²¹ He has complete comprehension of creation and perfect perception of history.²² He knows all things past, present, and future. He remembers the past, perceives and comprehends the present, and foreknows the future.

3. *The fruition of omniscience: God’s wisdom:* “supreme capability to use what he knows to devise and accomplish his plans”

God’s knowledge culminates in his ability to use what he knows practically and beneficially. Since God devised his eternal plan by his wisdom, he displays that wisdom when he implements his plan in creation,²³ providence,²⁴ and redemption.²⁵

B. *The Distinguishing Characteristics of Omniscience*

God’s knowledge bears all the earmarks of his supremacy. His knowledge is ideal, self-existent, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. These traits also characterize God’s mind and his wisdom.

1. *God’s knowledge is infallible.*

Since God is ideal, he knows all things *infallibly*. His supreme knowledge is perfect.²⁶ He cannot err.

2. *God’s knowledge is independent.*

Since God is self-existent, he knows all things *independently*.²⁷ He does not depend on outside sources or second-hand information. He does not need a team of researchers to acquire his knowledge.

3. *God’s knowledge is intuitive.*

Since God is infinite, he knows all things *intuitively*.²⁸ He does not attain supreme knowledge by a lengthy process of investigation and deduction. Rather, he knows everything inherently and completely.

4. *God’s knowledge is innate.*

Since God is eternal, he knows all things *innately*.²⁹ His supreme knowledge had no beginning. It always was. He was never ignorant of anything, but always knew everything that could or would happen. Some appeal to Acts 15:18 to support this: “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (KJV). Yet the Greek text has several variant readings. And, it is also translated: “who makes these things known from of old” (ASV). Thus, we should refrain from dogmatism regarding this text.

5. *God’s knowledge is incessant.*

Finally, since God is immutable, he knows all things *incessantly*. His mental faculty never deteriorates with time.³⁰ He never forgets anything. He never needs a refresher course. Everything he knows is always “at his fingertips.” Although he knew all things eternally, he also perceives and comprehends all that happens while it is happening: “the eyes of Jehovah are in every place keeping watch” (Prov. 15:3). Scripture thus extols God’s supreme knowledge. Only God knows infallibly, independently, intuitively, innately, and incessantly.

¹⁹ Matt. 11:27; John 17:24,25; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:11

²⁰ Matt. 11:21, 23

²¹ Rom. 11:33-34; Eph. 1:11

²² Heb. 4:13

²³ Prov. 3:19-22

²⁴ Eccles. 8:17

²⁵ 1 Cor. 1:18-24

²⁶ *Job 37:16:* Do you know the balancing of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?

²⁷ Rom. 11:34

²⁸ Ps. 147:5; Isa. 55:8-9

²⁹ Isa. 40:28

³⁰ *Ibid.*

C. *The Underlying Causes of Omniscience*

Why and how does God know all things? The grounds of omniscience lie buried in mystery. Scripture doesn't explain either how God eternally and intuitively knows himself and "all things possible," or how his supreme mind functions: "his understanding is infinite." Let us not meddle with things beyond the boundaries of biblical revelation. However, God's Word addresses the underlying causes of God's supreme knowledge of creation and history.³¹ God's supreme knowledge of "all things actual" and "all things historical" rests on his *omnipresence*,³² his *work of creation*,³³ and his *eternal decree*.³⁴

First, God knows everything that happens in history because he is everywhere. He continually perceives every event because he is ever-present, in every place, with his whole being.

Second God knows everything that exists because God created everything. The Creator comprehends all created things. He knows their properties, capabilities, functions, and intricacies, because he designed and constructed them all: "he has established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding he stretched out the heavens" (Jer. 10:12).

Third, God always knew everything that would exist and happen because he decreed it: "Your eyes did see my unformed substance; and in your book they were all written, even the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Ps. 139:16). God knows all about us because he wrote the book on us. His decree contains an infallible and exhaustive biography of every human being. God knows exactly what is happening because he decided exactly what would happen. God's decree alone differentiates what could have been (things possible) from what is (things actual). Thus, Paul says that God "works all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

II. *The Conspicuous Display of God's Omniscience: Supreme Knowledge and Wisdom*

We first consider the biblical display of God's supreme knowledge, then of his supreme wisdom.

A. *The Biblical Display of God's Supreme Knowledge*

We first survey God's perfect knowledge of himself, of *all things divine*. Next, since he framed his decree in eternity, we unfold his knowledge of *all things possible*. Third, since he commenced his work with creation, we look at his knowledge of *all things actual*. We conclude with his knowledge of all that happens in history, *all things historical*.

1. *God's supreme knowledge of himself, of all things divine*

God the Father and God the Son know each other completely and accurately.³⁵ God the Holy Spirit knows all the deep things of God.³⁶ Thus, each Person of the Trinity knows all things divine. Humans can only know God's purposes and ways because God reveals them to us in Scripture. We depend totally on Scripture for saving knowledge of God. Thus, God's self-knowledge incites us to appreciate his Word. We should read it, study it, memorize it, revere it, believe it, obey it, and thank God for it. Further, Paul asserts that God knows "the mind of the Holy Spirit."³⁷ He presents this lofty truth, not to encourage philosophical speculation, but to encourage God's people in our struggles with remaining sin and affliction. He wants

³¹ Ps. 139:7-16

³² Ps. 139:7-12

³³ Ps. 139:13-15

³⁴ Ps. 139:16

³⁵ *Matt. 11:27*: All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knows the Son, save the Father; neither does any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son wills to reveal him.

³⁶ *1 Cor. 2:10-11*: But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knows, save the Spirit of God.

³⁷ *Rom. 8:27*: he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Christians to know that the Holy Spirit prays effectively for us, even during our deepest valleys of discouragement and weariness, when we are not even sure what we should pray.

2. *God's supreme knowledge of all things possible*

Scripture presents God's knowledge of things that could have happened, but never did. It sometimes traffics in the hypothetical. What would have happened, if? Even when Scripture speculates, it knows only holy speculation. It always has a devotional flavor and practical design. God's supreme knowledge of the hypothetical guides his people through life's maze of danger and difficulty. For example, consider David's experience at Keilah.³⁸ David hears a report that Saul plans to trap him in Keilah, a walled city. Thus, he inquires of God. He asks if the report is true. He asks if Saul will come to Keilah to destroy him. God lifts back the veil of the hypothetical. He tells David that if he remains there, Saul will come. Then David asks God if the men of Keilah would hand him over to Saul. So the Lord tells David what would happen. If Saul comes, and if David remains in Keilah for protection, then, the men of Keilah would deliver David to Saul. So David arose and fled from Keilah. Thus, what would have happened, never did happen. God decreed that David would inquire about what would happen. He decreed to show David what would happen if he remained. He decreed that David would flee from Keilah, so that what would have happened, didn't happen. I say with Paul: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." God knows all things possible, and uses that knowledge to guide, protect, and care for his people. Thus, we also should inquire of the Lord when we face knotty decisions with perilous alternatives. Our Heavenly Father knows every contingency. He can and will guide us by his Word in the safe way that leads to life and glory.

As our omniscient God has infinite knowledge of all things possible in the future, so our omniscient Christ has infinite knowledge of all things possible in the past. For example, Christ pulls back the veil of the past to motivate sinners to repentance.³⁹ He explains that if he had done his miracles in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. He adds that if he had preached in Sodom, it would still remain. Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom. The Lord promised to spare Sodom for the sake of only ten righteous inhabitants.⁴⁰ If Christ's mighty works had been done in Sodom, at least ten men would have been converted, the city would have been spared, and therefore, it would still remain. Yet, Sodom was not spared. Again, Tyre would have repented if they had seen Jesus' mighty works, but they never saw them, did not repent, and perished. Thus, Jesus teaches us to appreciate gospel light. It is a privilege that God sends or withholds as he sees fit. Since Christ knew what would have happened in Sodom with perfect hindsight, then assuredly, the omniscient God foresaw all this with infallible foresight. God, foreknowing all that would have happened, determined, by his sovereign will alone, what actually did happen.⁴¹ He decided to withhold gospel light from Sodom, not because he foresaw that they would have remained impenitent, but rather, even though he foresaw that they would have repented. Thus, with these striking words, Christ proclaims God's sobering decree of reprobation.⁴² Jesus speaks this way because his hearers despised their gospel privileges. He warns them that they faced more severe punishment than the notorious sinners of Sodom. He assures them that God sovereignly dispenses saving grace. With these incentives, he motivates them to repent and calls them to himself.⁴³ Thus, our kind and gentle Savior incorporates reprobation into his evangelism. We must not be ashamed of Jesus or his methods. We too must deal faithfully with people's souls. As Jesus did, we must preach that salvation is of the Lord. We must love men enough to warn them

³⁸ *1 Sam. 23:11-12*: Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Jehovah, the God of Israel, I beseech you tell your servant. And Jehovah said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver up me and my men into the hand of Saul? And Jehovah said, They will deliver you up. Then David and his men . . . arose and departed out of Keilah.

³⁹ *Matt. 11:21, 23*: Woe unto you Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes . . . And you, Capernaum . . . you shall go down unto Hades, for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in you, it would have remained until this day.

⁴⁰ *Gen. 18:22-32*

⁴¹ *Rom. 9:18; Eph. 1:4-5, 11*

⁴² *1 Pet. 2:8*

⁴³ *Matt. 11:20-30*

plainly about the danger of despising gospel light, even while we plead with them, sincerely and graciously, to come to the Lord.

3. *God's supreme knowledge of all creation and every creature, of all things actual*

I survey the testimony of seven passages that display how God completely understands all creation and creatures.

a. *Job 37:16*⁴⁴

Elihu asks Job to contemplate all God does and to compare God's knowledge with his own. He wants Job to embrace that God's ways are unsearchable. Then the Lord himself answers Job and "pummels" him with a barrage of questions.⁴⁵ He reminds Job how little he really knows in comparison with God. God displays his knowledge of all creation to Job to reassure him that inscrutable divine wisdom ordered his sufferings. He also displays this knowledge to reprove Job for contending with the Lord.⁴⁶ He knows that Job needs a fresh sight of his supreme power and wisdom to endure his severe trial.⁴⁷ Thus, in our seasons of perplexity and trial, we should dwell on God's supreme knowledge. We should compare our knowledge with his until we sense afresh just how little we really know. In this way, we learn to think soberly. If we contend with God during our afflictions, we manifest that we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. In this way God uses suffering in the path of righteousness to produce in us, as he did in Job, deeper humility and greater appreciation of his grandeur (Job 42:6).

b. *Ps. 139:1*, ⁶⁴⁸

David admits that he can never know himself as well as God knows him. In this Psalm David uncovers the three taproots of God's supreme knowledge⁴⁹ and extols its great value.⁵⁰ Then he avows his abhorrence of God's enemies⁵¹ and seeks God's help in self-examination.⁵² David thus honors God's unsearchable thoughts: "How precious also are your thoughts" (139:17-18). He appreciates constant companionship with One who understands him completely: "When I awake, I am still with you." People sometimes complain, saying, "nobody understands me." Truly, we sometimes misjudge one another. Yet, Christians always enjoy, as David did, the companionship of a Friend who never misjudges us, who always understands us and knows us better than we know ourselves. Further, David avows firm opposition to God's enemies. The wicked hate his faithful Companion. They malign his Name and use it in vain: "they speak against you wickedly, and your enemies take your name in vain" (139:20). This grieves David. For this reason he detests them with a holy abhorrence and regards them as his enemies. Thus, God's supreme knowledge teaches us to detest a world that hates and maligns our precious Companion and closest Friend. Again, David requests God to help him in the discipline of self-examination: "Search me, O God, and know my heart" (139:23-24). Accordingly, we too should examine our hearts in dependence on the God who knows everything about us.

⁴⁴ *Job 37:16*: the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge

⁴⁵ *Job 38:4-5, 18-19, 21, 33, 36-37*: Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if you have understanding. Who determined the measures thereof, if you know? . . . Have you comprehended the earth in its breadth? Declare if you know it all. Where is the way to the dwelling of the light? And as for darkness, where is the place thereof . . . Doubtless, you know, for you were then born, and the number of your days is great! . . . Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? . . . Who has put wisdom in the inward parts? Or who has given understanding to the mind? Who can number the clouds by wisdom?

⁴⁶ *Job 40:1-2*, 8

⁴⁷ *Job 42:1-6*

⁴⁸ *Ps. 139:1*, 6: O Jehovah, you have searched me, and known me . . . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it

⁴⁹ *Ps. 139:7-16*

⁵⁰ *Ps. 139:17-18*

⁵¹ *Ps. 139:19-22*

⁵² *Ps. 139:23-24*

c. *Prov. 15:11*⁵³

Scripture states repeatedly that God fully understands every human heart.⁵⁴ Men see what is external. God perceives and comprehends what is internal and invisible to the human eye.⁵⁵ He alone knows everyone's inmost thoughts and cherished secrets.⁵⁶ He knows every heart continually.⁵⁷ He will judge all humanity accordingly.⁵⁸ Thus, we should value heart religion, not merely its external appearance, because God will condemn those whose religion consists only in empty rituals.⁵⁹ We should put away all hypocrisy, pretense, and deceit, knowing that we can never fool the all-knowing God. Therefore, we should make his approval our primary concern; men's approval secondary.⁶⁰

d. *Matt. 10:29-30*⁶¹

Jesus reasons from the lesser to the greater. If God pays attention to every individual bird, he will surely pay attention to his children. God even knows how many hairs each Christian has on his head. Some focus on the "big picture," but have little patience with details. Others seem to major on the trees, but have a hard time seeing the forest. The Lord, ever mindful of his overall purpose for us, also scrutinizes our lives in minute detail. What lesson does Jesus draw from this? He exhorts the disciples to serve God boldly in a hostile world: "Fear them not therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:31). Opposition and threats should not cower us from Christ's service. We should have confidence in our Father's protection and care. Similarly, the Lord exhorts his disciples to trust their omniscient Father to provide their needs: "Be not anxious . . . *your heavenly Father knows* that you have need of all these things" (Matt. 6:31-32). Thus, God's omniscience teaches us that we should put away carnal anxiety, whether about protection from the world, or about provision for our bodily needs. Notice how Jesus enforces this lesson: "Behold the birds . . . *your heavenly Father feeds them*. Are you not of much more value than they?" (Matt. 6:26); and, "you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:31). God protects and provides for Christians because he considers us more valuable than "many" birds. Thus, God's omniscience teaches us that no creature is worthless or valueless. Even a bird is valuable. A Christian is far more valuable. Therefore, we only view humans and animals properly when we view God properly. Thus, when people reject the omniscient God, they grope to find "self-worth." We must not overreact and say that human beings have "no value whatsoever." Rather, we must urge people to get right with our omniscient Father, who imparts to his children a wholesome sense of their value and worth.

e. *John 21:17*⁶².

Scripture presents God's omniscience in an intensely personal way. Peter reasons from the general: "you know all things," to the particular and personal: "you know that I love you." When the Lord gently reminds Peter of his shameful denial, he appeals to Christ's omniscience. God not only knows our faults and failures, he also knows our sincere affection for him. This should comfort us. That comfort should evoke ardent service to the Lord: "Feed my sheep." Does the Lord know that you love him, Christian? Then serve him. Put your heart and soul into your service for his kingdom and people.

⁵³ *Prov. 15:11*: Sheol and Abaddon are before Jehovah: how much more the hearts of the children of men!

⁵⁴ Ps. 7:9; Prov. 17:3, 21:2; Jer. 17:10; Acts 15:8; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 14:25; Rev. 2:23

⁵⁵ 1 Sam. 16:7

⁵⁶ *1 Kings 8:39*: then hear in heaven your dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and render unto every man according to all his ways, whose heart you know; for you, even you only, know the hearts of all the children of men.

⁵⁷ 1 Chron. 28:9

⁵⁸ Rom. 2:16

⁵⁹ Luke 16:15

⁶⁰ Matt. 6:4, 6, 18; 1 Cor. 4:3-5

⁶¹ *Matt. 10:29-30*: Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered

⁶² *John 21:17*: He said unto him the third time, do you love me? And he said unto him, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus says unto him, Feed my sheep

f. *Heb. 4:13*⁶³

When Scripture speaks of God's "eyes," it refers to his faculty of perception. It draws analogy between man's limited perception and God's infinite perception. Men see with interruption, only in one direction, and only in one place. God sees without interruption, in all directions, and in all places. The writer uses God's omniscience to enforce his exhortation to pursue heaven with diligence: "Let us therefore give diligence to enter that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience" (Heb. 4:11). He recounts the bad example of the wilderness generation. He warns professing Christians not to follow their bad example or harden their hearts in unbelief and disobedience.⁶⁴ He exhorts professing Christians that live in an orderly way to maintain their present course with diligence. Winds of persecution and temptation threaten to blow them off course, and shipwreck their souls on the rocks of apostasy. Thus, they must remember the omniscience of God. God's omniscience furnishes strong incentive to stand firm in Christian faith when tempted to vacillate or compromise with error.

g. *1 John 3:19-21*⁶⁵

Throughout this letter, John teaches Christians how to attain assurance of salvation (1 John 5:13). When we love the brethren in word and deed, we display one vital piece of evidence that we are Christians. If we fail to discern any love for other Christians in our hearts and lives, our conscience condemns us. If our own conscience condemns us, how much more the God who "knows all things"? Thus, God's omniscience commends conscientiousness. A good conscience emboldens us before the omniscient God.

4. *God's supreme knowledge of history, of all things historical, of the past, present, and future*

God's knowledge of the past is his *remembrance*, of the present, his *perception*, and of the future, his *foreknowledge*.

a. *God's remembrance of the past*

Scripture highlights that God remembers *the vows* of his covenants,⁶⁶ *the virtues* of his people,⁶⁷ and *the vices* of his enemies.⁶⁸

First, Scripture highlights that God remembers the vows of his covenants: "to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore unto Abraham our father" (Luke 1:72). Scripture repeatedly affirms that God remembers his oath-bound promises.⁶⁹ God in kindness sometimes even associates visible reminders, or tokens, with these promises. He ordains these tokens, not for his sake, but for ours. When he sees the token, he remembers his promise.⁷⁰ God's remembrance of his oaths supplies his people with effectual arguments to plead before him in prayer. It also provides us with great encouragement and strong hope. It also moves us to bless his name.⁷¹

⁶³ *Heb. 4:13*: there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

⁶⁴ *Heb. 4:1-8*

⁶⁵ *1 John 3:19-21*: Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him: because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness before God.

⁶⁶ *Luke 1:68-69, 72*: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has visited and wrought redemption for his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us . . . to show mercy to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore unto Abraham our father.

⁶⁷ *Heb. 6:10*: God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which you showed toward his name, in that you ministered unto the saints and still do minister.

⁶⁸ *Rev. 18:4-5*: Come forth, my people, out of her, that you have no fellowship with her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues: for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

⁶⁹ *Gen. 9:15-16; Exod. 2:24, 6:5; Lev. 26:42; Pss. 105:8, 42, 106:45*

⁷⁰ *Gen. 9:15-16; Num. 10:9*

⁷¹ *Exod. 32:13; Heb. 6:13-20; Luke 1:68*

Second, Scripture highlights that God remembers his people's works of love. He never forgets our faithful service or good works.⁷² This prods us to abound in benevolent deeds by which we minister to needy Christians. Even if people forget our kindness, despise our service, or take us for granted, God is never "unrighteous to forget." This astonishing truth motivates us to continue diligently in well-doing.⁷³ It encourages us to plead with God that he would remember us for good, in the light of our faithful service to him.⁷⁴ Finally, since God never forgets either our good works or his sworn promises to bless us, we should never feel sorry for ourselves or despair.⁷⁵ Dear Christian, Christ's hands supply a sufficient reminder of his love for you. The omniscient God can never forget those for whom Christ died.

Third, Scripture highlights God's remembrance of the sinful words and actions of his enemies. God remembers the ways of the wicked and will punish them for their iniquity.⁷⁶ Therefore, we should have no fellowship with them in their sins. Therefore, we have strong incentive to plead with God to thwart and judge evil efforts to undermine the work of the Lord.⁷⁷ This displays the folly of those that think they can sin and get away with it. Although God suffers long with sinners, and delays implementing his judgment, he never forgets. Sooner or later his reckoning will come. He remembers their sin and will punish them eternally. Thus, all everyone should get right with the omniscient God who never forgets.

b. God's perception of the present

Scripture underscores that God's omnipresence supports his perception of everything that happens in history, while it is happening: "the eyes of Jehovah are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). God never sleeps. He never even blinks. He knows everything that happens because he is always present, with his entire Being, everywhere.

c. God's foreknowledge of the future

God alone has infallible and complete knowledge of the past and future. This knowledge proves that he is the only true God.⁷⁸ Accordingly, he challenges false gods to display what they know about the future: "that we may know that you are gods." Thus, divine prophecy protects us from idolatry.⁷⁹ He publishes his foreknowledge to shut the mouth of unbelief: "lest you should say, My idol has done it." Thus, the prophets have great value for us. When they publish the Lord's foreknowledge, they confirm that he alone is God, and that the Bible alone is his Word. This reproveth our doubts and strengthens our resolve to trust and believe God in a generation of skeptics.

B. The Display of God's Supreme Wisdom

I survey the display of his wisdom in creation, providence, and salvation.

1. God's wisdom displayed in creation

We survey the testimony of three texts that feature this display: Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19-20; Jer. 10:11-12.

⁷² Matt. 25:36-40; Acts 10:3

⁷³ Heb. 6:11

⁷⁴ Ps. 20:3; Neh. 13:22, 31

⁷⁵ *Isa. 49:14-16*: But Zion said, Jehovah has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet will I not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands.

⁷⁶ Ezek. 21:23-24; Amos 8:7; Rev. 16:19

⁷⁷ Neh. 13:29

⁷⁸ *Isa. 41:22-24*: Let them bring forth, and declare unto us what shall happen: declare ye the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or show us things to come. Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods: yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. Behold, you are of nothing, and your work is of naught; an abomination is he that chooses you.

⁷⁹ *Isa. 48:5*: therefore I have declared it to you from of old; before it came to pass I showed it to you; lest you should say, My idol has done it

a. *Ps. 104:24*⁸⁰

As we have seen, this psalm unfolds the wonders of creation. This text affirms that every aspect of creation displays God's supreme wisdom. The display of God's glory in creation evokes thanksgiving and praise: "Bless Jehovah, O my soul. O Jehovah my God, you are very great; you are clothed with honor and majesty . . . I will sing unto Jehovah as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have any being" (Ps. 104:1, 33). We too should contemplate creation until praise to our Creator bursts from our hearts. True religion should foster a scientific effort to discern God's handiwork in the world. Good science accurately analyzes creation with a devotional heart that pleases the Creator: "Let my meditation be sweet unto him" (Ps. 104:34). Thus, science should study the world with an eye to behold the wisdom of its Designer, not with an evil mind, bent on denying his workmanship. Therefore, evolutionary science can never be good science. It can never please God or analyze creation accurately. It must fail because it operates with a pre-formed commitment to prove, contrary to fact, that the world exists by chance, not intelligent design. Finally, God's wisdom displayed in creation moves us to hope for the day when the world will be free from sin: "Let sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more" (Ps. 104:35). The wicked obscure our view of God's glory in creation. This moves us to long for new heavens and earth, and to pray, "Lord Jesus, come quickly."

b. *Prov. 3:19-20*⁸¹

The wise man urges his son to get and retain wisdom.⁸² God's wisdom displayed in creation bolsters his appeal. Thus, this display underscores the tremendous value of biblical wisdom. Therefore, we should contemplate God's wisdom in creation until it stirs godly longings to pursue biblical wisdom. This commends using the biblical means of getting wisdom: studying God's Word,⁸³ walking in his fear,⁸⁴ following godly parental guidance,⁸⁵ avoiding wicked company,⁸⁶ and praying for wisdom.⁸⁷

c. *Jer. 10:11-12*⁸⁸

Jeremiah contrasts the Creator's wisdom and power with the ignorance and impotence of idols. The demise of false gods shows the disgrace of idolatry. Thus, God's people should not imitate such evil behavior: "Learn not the way of the nations, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the nations are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are vanity" (Jer. 10:2-3). God's wisdom displayed in creation teaches us never to tremble at superstitions that stem from idolatry.

2. *God's wisdom displayed in providence*⁸⁹

As God's robes his wisdom in creation in majesty, so he robes his wisdom in providence in mystery. The inspired preacher finds such wisdom inscrutable. Even a wise man cannot uncover the rationale for what

⁸⁰ *Ps. 104:24*: O Jehovah, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all: the earth is full of your riches.

⁸¹ *Prov. 3:19-20*: Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew.

⁸² *Prov. 3:13, 21-22*: Happy is the man that finds wisdom, and the man that gets understanding . . . My son, let them not depart from your eyes; Keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life unto your soul, and grace to your neck.

⁸³ *Prov. 1:1-6*

⁸⁴ *Prov. 1:7, 9:10*

⁸⁵ *Prov. 1:8-9, 3:1, 4:1-5*

⁸⁶ *Prov. 1:10-16*

⁸⁷ *Prov. 2:4-6; James 1:5*

⁸⁸ *Jer. 10:11-12*: Thus shall you say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens. He has made the earth by his power, he has established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding has he stretched out the heavens.

⁸⁹ *Eccles. 8:16-17, 9:1*: When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth, (for also there is that neither day nor night sees sleep with his eyes), then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because however much a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea moreover, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it. For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it be love or hatred, man knows it not; all is before them.

transpires in history. We can't explain why one good man dies at young age of cancer, while another experiences an extraordinary cure that adds twenty years to his life. We only know that God orders all in incomprehensible wisdom. This mystery of providence teaches us to embrace our limits. Some events may seem random, even haphazard, as though the All-Wise God left the helm. We must judge, not by appearance, but by Scripture. We must believe that God runs the world wisely. Packer affirms this:⁹⁰

Now, the mistake that is commonly made is to suppose that . . . the gift of wisdom consists in a deepened insight into the providential meaning and purpose of events going on around us, an ability to see why God has done what He has done in a particular case, and what He is going to do next. People feel that if they were really walking close to God, so that He could impart wisdom to them freely, then they would, so to speak, find themselves in the signal box; they would discern the real purpose of everything that happened to them, and it would be clear to them every moment how God was making all things work together for good . . . So far from the gift of wisdom consisting in the power to do this, the gift actually presupposes our conscious inability to do it.

For us wisdom does not involve entering God's control tower and seeing all the intricacies of providence. Rather, it involves the realization that, as long as we live, we behold our lives moving in what seems sometimes as a maze of confusion. It also involves the conviction that God is always operating the signal tower of providence, and, that he operates it competently, carefully, justly, and wisely.

3. God's wisdom displayed in salvation

I survey the testimony of five texts: Luke 11:49; Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 1:20-25; Eph. 3:8-11; Col. 2:3.

a. Luke 11:49⁹¹

Jesus describes the frightening judgment that God pronounced on the final generation of Hebrew Israel. When they killed Jehovah Jesus, their rebellion reached its zenith and brought ruin on their society.⁹² Then his wisdom took his kingdom from them and gave it to the Christian church, a spiritual nation "bringing forth the fruits thereof."⁹³ God bears long with disobedience. When his forbearance reaches its limit, with wisdom he judges swiftly, severely, and irrevocably. Thus, we should not try his patience. We should value the servants that he sends in his name. Our attitude to them reflects our attitude to him.

b. Rom. 11:33⁹⁴

God in his wisdom makes the rebellion of Hebrew Israel the means of showing mercy to all the nations. Then in wisdom he makes that mercy the means of showing mercy to his rebellious people: "For God has shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32). God's plan of salvation leaves him on center stage. It shines the spotlight on his mercy. This extols his supreme wisdom.

c. 1 Cor. 1:20-25⁹⁵

God robes his wisdom in providence in mystery. He robes his wisdom in salvation in the appearance of folly. The "foolishness of God" paradoxically displays the grandeur of supreme wisdom. His wisdom in salvation opposes, not merely surpasses, the wisdom of worldly men. He decided that the world would

⁹⁰ James I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 92

⁹¹ *Luke 11:49*: Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send unto them prophets and apostles; and some of them they shall kill and persecute; that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation

⁹² 1 Thess. 2:15-16

⁹³ Matt. 21:43; 1 Pet. 2:9-10

⁹⁴ *Rom. 11:33*: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!

⁹⁵ *1 Cor. 1:20-25*: Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe. Seeing that . . . the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified . . . unto the Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called . . . Christ . . . the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men

never attain fellowship with him through its philosophical quest. He decided to save sinners from his wrath only through the preaching of Christ crucified, a message that worldly philosophers regard as absurd. Christ is the divine wisdom that solved mankind's greatest problem. Thus God renders men's insights useless for salvation. Paul explains why: "But God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise . . . that no flesh should glory before God" (1 Cor. 1:27, 29). God aims to receive all the glory for salvation, both for its accomplishment and application. He accomplishes salvation through the cross. He applies salvation to "not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble," to humble us all, and bring himself all credit. He leaves no room for anyone to steal his glory, not philosophers, nor preachers, nor penitents. God's wisdom in salvation teaches us this ultimate lesson: "him that glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31).

*d. Eph. 3:8, 10-11*⁹⁶

The church displays God's "manifold" wisdom. God ordered this display, not after he failed to work out a plan for a Jewish kingdom, but "according to his eternal purpose." Angels, not merely men, see this profound display: "unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." Paul conducts his ministry to Gentiles with the noble vision that churches planted through his labor would display God's supreme wisdom. The church gathers those that believe in Christ from every ethnic background into one spiritual nation, society, and family. Thus, in God's wise design, the church displays publicly that sinners get right with God through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. Further, since God designs the Christian ministry to foster this display of his wisdom, we should realize its great value. Those who labor in gospel ministry should keep this noble aim in view.

*e. Col. 2:3*⁹⁷

Paul pulls back the veil and shows us what he prays for God's people. He prays that they may know greater comfort and love. He prays that "they may know the mystery of God, even Christ." He prays this way because he stands convinced of Christ's sufficiency. Jesus Christ is an infinite treasure chest of wisdom, the unique display of God's supreme wisdom. Thus, Paul warns the Colossians about growing dissatisfied with Christ. He warns them not to look for the answers to their problems in the world: "This I say that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech . . . Take heed lest there shall be anyone who makes spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:4, 8). We must greatly beware this tendency to look to the teaching of the world, rather than to the Word of Christ, for guidance and insight in raising our children, in tackling emotional problems, and in restoring troubled marriages. We must remember that all wisdom and knowledge reside in Christ, not in worldly philosophy and psychology.

III. The Practical Relevance of God's Omniscience

Omniscience is useful for instruction, consolation, confirmation, provision, and exhortation.

A. Instruction from God's Omniscience

It teaches us the excellency of wisdom (Prov. 3:19-20).

It teaches us the value of all creatures, the Christian gospel, church, and ministry (Matt. 6:26, 10:31, 11:21, 23; Eph. 3:8, 10-11).

It teaches us the inscrutability of divine providence (Eccles. 8:16-17, 9:1).

It teaches us the sufficiency of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:5-8).

It teaches us the absurdity of thinking anyone can get away with sin (Rev. 18:5).

B. Comfort from God's Omniscience

It comforts us because God ever watches over us (Isa. 40:28).

It comforts us because God never forgets us (Isa. 49:14-16).

⁹⁶ *Eph. 3:8, 10-11*: Unto me . . . was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ . . . to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁹⁷ *Col. 2:3*: the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

It comforts us because God always keeps his sworn promises to us (Luke 1:72).

It comforts us because God always remembers our faithful service to him (Heb. 6:10).

It comforts because the Holy Spirit prays for us, even when we don't know what to pray (Rom. 8:27).

C. Confirmation from God's Omniscience

Divine foreknowledge strengthens our faith that Jehovah is the one true God (Isa. 41:21-24, 48:5).

D. Provision from God's Omniscience

It supplies a stockpile of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 3:5; James 1:5).

It supplies effectual argument to plead before God (Neh. 13:22, 29, 31; Luke 1:72).

E. Exhortation from God's Omniscience

It exhorts about communion with God, cultivation of grace, and contemplation of his work.

1. God's omniscience exhorts us to godly communion with the Lord.

a. Omniscience calls us to seek God for guidance and counsel (1 Sam. 23:11-12; Prov. 3:13, 21-22; Col. 3:5).

b. Omniscience calls us to praise God (Pss. 104:1, 33, 147:5; Rom. 11:33-36, 16:27).

c. Omniscience calls us to appreciate God's special presence (Ps. 139:17,18).

d. Omniscience calls us to cleave to God alone (Jer. 10:10-12).

e. Omniscience calls us to trust God for protection and provision (Matt. 6:31-32,10:29-31).

f. Omniscience calls us to serve God (John 21:17).

g. Omniscience calls us to honor God (Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 1:17-31).

2. God's omniscience exhorts us to diligent cultivation of grace.

a. Omniscience urges us to cultivate humility (Job 1:21, 37:16, 38:1-39-30; Gen. 18:25).

b. Omniscience urges us to cultivate expectancy for eternal glory (Ps. 104:35; Heb. 6:10).

c. Omniscience urges us to cultivate sanctity (Ps. 139:19-22).

d. Omniscience urges us to cultivate sincerity (Ps. 139:23-24; Prov. 15:11; Ezek. 11:5; 1 John 3:19-21).

e. Omniscience urges us to cultivate sagacity (Prov. 3:13-15, 21-22).

f. Omniscience urges us to cultivate honesty (Matt. 11:21, 23).

g. Omniscience urges us to cultivate tenacity (Heb. 4:11-13).

3. God's omniscience exhorts us to biblical contemplation of his works.

a. We should study and analyze creation until praise and gratitude flow from our lips (Ps. 104:24).

b. We should meditate on the mystery of providence until we stand lost in wonder (Eccles. 8:16-17, 9:1).

c. We should contemplate salvation until we give God all the glory (Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 1:17-25).

In Conclusion, omniscience graciously invites all sinners to forsake their sinful ways and thoughts and seek the Lord, while there is still time (Isa. 55:6-9). May the Lord be pleased to write these many lessons of his supreme mind, knowledge, and wisdom on our hearts.

