

## Omniscience

The question of what God knows has been contentious through the ages. The answer to this question defines a number of things about God's character and when considered in concert with His omnipotence has profound implications for our own understanding of God. There are a number of different ways to define omniscience. A particular distinction to understand when approaching this topic is the two ways this trait might manifest itself. Inherent omniscience is a manifestation defined as "the **ability** to know anything that one chooses to know and can be known". While total omniscience is a manifestation defined as "actually knowing everything that can be known" (Source: Wikipedia<sup>1</sup>)

### The Evidence of God's Omniscience

Any examination of the evidence for an attribute of God should start with the scriptures. Nowhere in scripture do we see the word omniscient. There is, however, plenty of discussion of the scope and form of His knowledge. I list a few of those references below.

### References

- Scope of
- Job 23:10 "He knoweth the way that I take"
- Psalm 139:4 "Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely"
- Psalm 147:5 "His understanding is infinite"
- Ephesians 1:3-4 God chose us before the foundation of the world
- Hebrews 4:13 "His knowledge is perfect"
- Transcendence of
- Romans 11:33-36 "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"
- Isaiah 55:8-9 "so are my ways higher than your way, and my thoughts than your thoughts"

We can see that these references refer to both the scope and the transcendence of God's understanding and knowledge. There is ample evidence of a theme of omniscience in scripture. References to his foreknowledge (Ps 139:4), The completeness of His knowledge (Heb 4:13), and the scope/transcendence of His knowledge (Is 55:8-9) all point to a picture of a God who is not limited by lack of information. They paint a picture of a God who is possessed of information that is beyond our own limited understanding.

### The Scope of God's Omniscience

What is the form of God's omniscience though? Is it inherent or total? Is it merely the **ability** to know or is it actual **possession** of that knowledge? Any consideration of these questions will have to take into account what scripture says and expound on the implications of those statements. Before we do so, let's enumerate what we **can** know directly from scripture.

### Facts about God's Omniscience

1. God possesses knowledge of the future. (Ps 139:4, Eph 1:3-4)
2. God possesses knowledge of current events (Job 23:10)
3. God possesses knowledge of the past. (Rev 1:8, Isa 57:15, Col 1:15-17)
4. The knowledge God possesses is complete (Ps 139:4, Heb 4:13)
5. The knowledge God possesses is infinite (Ps 147:5)

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<sup>1</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omniscience#Definitions>

6. The knowledge God possesses is higher (Rom 11:33-36, Is 55:8-9)

We can gain the most understanding if we combine these facts and reason about the interactions between them. We can see that God possesses knowledge of all of time past, present, and future from the first three. We see from the fourth that His knowledge of all of time is complete. We can therefore conclude that He is not missing any knowledge of the future. We also see, in the fifth, that God's knowledge is infinite. These warrant a deeper look. God doesn't just know all of the future up to a certain point in time. He knows all the future for all of eternity. In fact, if multiple futures are possible then infinite and complete knowledge requires that He know all of those futures as well. The sixth highlights God's transcendent knowledge. This one is a little harder to reason about. Its very definition means knowledge that is out of our grasp. Not just unavailable or unknown to us but actually beyond our ability to comprehend.

What do these interactions tell us about the nature of God's knowledge? We know that whatever God wants or needs to know He does. Any question we ask ourselves about what God knows must be answered in the affirmative. The phrasing of these facts in scripture, at least to my mind, indicate a total possession of knowledge. They don't say God **can** know they say He **does** know. In Scripture the knowledge of God seems to have an immediacy to it.

### **Implications of God's Omniscience**

So what does complete, infinite, and transcendental knowledge imply for God's interaction with the world? We can never truly understand what it would be like to have the complete infinite knowledge that is described in scripture. It lies completely outside of our own experience. God is never surprised. God is never unprepared. God is never at a loss. He always knows exactly what to expect, when to expect it, and how to handle it.

Complete knowledge implies that He knows us completely. Our own family and loved ones do not and cannot know us as completely as God knows us. We ourselves cannot and do not know ourselves as completely as God knows us. God's love is given with full knowledge of who and what we are. In fact, we are incapable of loving ourselves or others as deeply as God is capable of loving us, simply because we are incapable of knowing ourselves or others as completely as God knows us.

Complete knowledge informs all of God's decisions and acts. If God is truly omnipotent and omniscient then His every act is all the more miraculous. He completely knows the full results of everything He does. By implication He **intends** every result of every act that He does. He knew every result of His act of creation and He still considered it good. He knew the tragedy that would result and He knew the blessings that would result and He considers it good (Gen 1). God didn't create the universe and then get caught off guard by the results. He knew what would happen and indeed had already decided how He would respond. His decision to sacrifice his Son and indeed His Son's decision to sacrifice himself was made before the smallest atom of the universe ever came into being.

For God any decision has a known and understandable result. Imagine always knowing exactly how to accomplish your goal and having all the necessary power to do so. This has implications for our understanding of the world He created. We can know that every individual was intended by God to exist and live. No one individual is an accident or an unfortunate byproduct. Each one was desired by God or they would not exist. God doesn't do accidents.

### **Conclusion**

The case for God's omniscience is strong in Scripture and can't be denied. Furthermore the scope of that knowledge is presented as immediate, complete, and infinite. It covers all of time and informs all of God's actions. Any consideration of God's traits must take into account His omniscience. God's

traits do not exist in a vacuum independent of each other. They interact and as such impact each other. An understanding of God is not complete until some consideration of His omniscience has been taken into account. The nature of God is such that any contemplation of Him will necessarily take eternity to complete. His omniscience alone would take that long to come to grips with. It is nevertheless a worthwhile endeavor and very rewarding in the awe and worship it inspires. It demonstrates the true worth of ourselves and all others. You do not really know the value of another person until you have factored in God's Omniscience to your understanding.

### **Further discussion**

- How does His omniscience relate to the question of salvation?
  - Omnipotence
  - Omnipresence
  - Does God ever limit his knowledge?
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