Section: Doctrine of God

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q11. Does God know all things?**

Yes. God knows all things eternally. Nothing can be hidden from God. He is omniscient.

“Omniscient” [om-nish-uh nt]

Good evening. I’m excited to get to bring the teaching tonight…..

Read Q&A

The focus of question 11 is the attribute of God’s knowledge, or His omniscience. We will also spend some time looking at the wisdom of God.

1 John 3:20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

The word omniscient means just that – God knows everything.

As simple as that may be to understand the meaning of, the concept itself, like God, is incomprehensible, but as we grow in our understanding of the perfection of God’s knowledge, we grow in our knowledge of Him. So it is well worth the time and effort we give to it.

Let’s pray

As Matt taught a few weeks ago, All of the attributes of God are inseparably interconnected. No one divine attribute can be separated from any other attribute.  Each attribute is dependent and works in perfect unity with the other attributes. God’s attributes are never in conflict with one another but actually function as one simple perfection. What do we mean by one simple perfection?

God is sometimes referred to by theologians as a simple “being”. Simple- meaning not compound, not made up of parts…ONE SIMPLE PERFECTION. We do not mean elementary or uncomplicated, because as we have already learned, God is incomprehensible.

One of the reasons to understand this concept is because as we study the attributes in an individual fashion we will see that there are implications of each attribute that will not fit perfectly with the other attributes if they are not properly understood.

So, if we have an understanding of one of God’s attributes that contradicts or is in conflict with another of His attributes, we know that the error is in our understanding and not in God’s perfect character. Thinking about the “simple perfection” of God while we study His attributes will help us to avoid error in our understanding.

I plan to use several of the theological terms and words that we have learned in previous weeks. Not because I want to sound intellectual but because I want us to be able to communicate clearly in a universal way. If we want to be able to learn from our forefathers-the faithful Bible teachers who have gone before us- we need to have a knowledge of the words that are commonly used in their writings.

I will try to define the terms as they are used but if you forget the meaning of immutability or aseity, etc…you can find them in the glossary of your Catechism book.

Finally, we’ll look closer at some specific implications towards the end of this lesson by looking at God’s knowledge of the future.

Let’s look at the definition of omniscience that is used in our Catechism book.

The Omniscience of God - God has perfect, complete knowledge. He knows all things that exist and all things that could have existed. He never learns, nor does He forget. God cannot grow in understanding, knowledge, or wisdom, because He lacks nothing.

The word omniscient is not in the bible, but like the word “trinity” it explains a reality that the Bible teaches. The word omniscient is used to more easily try to summarize the nature and extent of God’s knowledge.

The Knowledge of God

Louis Berkhof defines the knowledge of God:

**The knowledge of God may be defined as**that perfection of God whereby He**,**in an entirely unique manner**,**knows Himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal and most simple act**.**

There are several components to this definition that we will look at closer:

Let’s start by looking at what it means that God knows everything in an:

Entirely unique manner

It is very important for us to be reminded that we cannot try to understand God’s knowledge by thinking of our own way of knowing and obtaining knowledge.

Humans increase in knowledge in time, in successive acts, through effort (such as study, observation, thought, reason, etc).

For example, you may study a math book to learn more about calculus. You are seeking to increase in knowledge.

Or consider how we obtain knowledge through observation and reason…if you’re a parent of little ones, let’s say you open the pantry to grab the blueberry lollipop to eat that you put in there an hour earlier. But you suddenly obverse the lollipop is gone. In this you have just taken on new knowledge…namely, the lollipop is not where you put it—it is missing. You didn’t know that before you opened the pantry, now you do.

Then, you call your three kids into the kitchen. You line them up and ask them to open their mouths. And behold, your 3-year-old has a candy-blue colored tongue. With your reason you conclude and know that the 3-year-old ate your blueberry lollipop.

In these examples you see that humans increase in knowledge in time, in successive acts, through effort (study, observation, thought, reason, etc).

But God is wholly other than us. He does not have knowledge the way we do, in our limited way. He never learns, nor does He forget. God cannot grow in understanding, knowledge, or wisdom, because He lacks nothing. God has perfect, complete knowledge.

One of the big reasons people misunderstand God is that they think of Him as a super improved version of ourselves. That is not a biblical way to honor God. That we are made in God’s image does not mean that we are just like Him.

Job 37:16 Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge

Do you know the balancings of the clouds? Of course we don’t! I don’t even understand the question! We can’t even hope to have the knowledge it would take to FULLY grasp just one aspect of God’s creation. Do we think that we can more easily understand Him who created it all and is perfect in knowledge? No. God is perfect, we are far from perfect.

He is Holy. He is set apart and high above every created thing. His ways are not our ways.

We have to make every effort to stop ourselves from thinking of God in human terms. Anthropomorphic descriptions of God in scripture are there to help us understand aspects of God’s character and nature, but we must understand this in terms of God graciously condescending to our level in order to help us gain some concept of God’s Holy character.

God does not gain knowledge, nor does He learn anything, and certainly not from us!

If God could learn anything that would have to mean there was something He didn’t know. It would also mean that God changes from one degree of knowledge to another--but God does not change. That is the attribute of His immutability, that God is unchanging, He remains the same. We’ll come back to this point later.

The nature of God’s knowledge is vastly different from our own. God knows intuitively and from within Himself. His knowledge is not dependent on anything outside of Himself. We gain knowledge through observation of things external to us. Even things that we may think we know instinctively are gifts that have been given to us by God.

When Matt taught on question 4: Does God have a beginning? He taught about the Aseity of God. Look with me at that definition again (from your Catechism book):

**The Aseity of God:** God does not owe His existence to anything or anyone outside Himself, nor does He need anything beyond Himself to maintain His existence. He is self-contained, self-existent, self-sufficient, and independent.

God’s knowledge is in perfect harmony with His aseity. They are completely intertwined. Just like His existence - God’s knowledge is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself.

Our catechism definition says, “He never learns, nor does He forget. God cannot grow in understanding, knowledge, or wisdom, because He lacks nothing”

You can see why God’s knowledge is unique.

Let’s look at our next point:

He knows Himself

**1 Cor. 2:10-11** For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

How many of us could honestly say we know ourselves? Do we always know and understand why we do the things we do? Why we act the way we act? Why we say the things we say? Why we want the things we want?

It’s quite the opposite right? If anything we are often baffled at some of the things we do.

God knows Himself fully and completely. Think about that for a minute. The infinite, eternal God knows himself completely!

**1 John 1:5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Light is not referring to just moral purity, but also to awareness. Light illuminates and reveals. To say, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all”, is to say that God is completely self-aware.

He knows Himself…

and all things possible

He knows all things that ***could have*** existed.

The bible gives us some examples of instances where God communicates His knowledge of things that could happen or could have happened but do not.

**In Matt. 11: 21** Jesus says "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

And in **verse 23** And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

In **1 Samuel 23** David inquires of God if the men of Keilah will turn him and his army over to Saul:

11 Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please tell your servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down." 12 Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will surrender you." 13 Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. 14 And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, *but God did not give him into his hand.*

The implication here is that David and his men would have been surrendered into Saul’s hand IF action had not been taken. That is what could have happened IF God had not willed a different outcome. We see here that the means God used to bring about His will was the warning given to David by way of God’s omniscience.

This knowledge of all things possible is an intellectual knowledge that is not directly acted upon by His will. He knows what WILL happen IF He chooses to act in a certain way. It does not actually happen because God acts to affect the actual outcome in a different way.

Because God knows all things possible we never have to wonder why God didn’t do something differently. He never does something and then realizes, “oh, I should have done it the other way.” He knows what would happen in every possible scenario and He has perfectly decreed (before time) all that comes about as it does.

The fact that God knows Himself completely means that He is also aware of all of His potential. It is hard for us to imagine all of the possible options that God could have chose to create; the possibilities are endless to us, but He knows them all.

He knows all of the possible ways and means to affect all of the possible outcomes. In His wisdom and His goodness, His sovereignty and His power, He wills to bring about the best means to the best end.

He knows all things possible AND…

He Knows all things actual

God knows everything perfectly, in truth. God’s knowledge of things is true reality.

Wayne Grudem says it this way:

*To say that God knows all things and that his knowledge is perfect is to say that he is never mistaken in his perception or understanding of the world: all that he knows and thinks is true and is a correct understanding of the nature of reality. In fact, since God knows all things infinitely well, we can say that the standard of true knowledge is conformity to God’s knowledge. If we think the same thing God thinks about anything in the universe, we are thinking truthfully about it.*

All things actual are those things that have existed and happened in the past, the present, and the future. He has perfect knowledge of all that has happened, all that IS happening, and all that WILL happen.

All things actual are directly connected to His eternal purpose. They are everything that He has ordained in His own Holy counsel.

His knowledge goes beyond just knowing actual events, He even knows our actual thoughts and emotions.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two- edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

More anthropomorphic language here. We know that God does not have eyes but the idea is made clear to us that nothing in creation is hidden from Him. All are naked and exposed in regard to being fully known and under His judgment. We will not be able to cover up or hide the true condition of our hearts.

Through God’s word we have the necessary discernment to know our true condition. The word of God allows us to see ourselves “naked and exposed” through God’s eyes so to speak. God knows everything about us. He uses His word to show us what He knows about us.

Seeing the true condition of our hearts, having our thoughts and motivations exposed, humbles us. It makes the message of the gospel much more glorious to us by showing us how desperately we need a savior. It puts an end to our self-righteousness and to sinful ways of judging others as a way to make ourselves better than them.

The one who has been forgiven much loves much and the one who has been forgiven little loves little. Knowing how much we have been forgiven is a gift that causes our hearts to fill up with worship and love for our great and gracious God.

When we are self-reflective and aware of the sin that has come from our hearts it is not a peaceful thing. The fact that God knows our hearts is only a comfort for those who have put their faith in Him. To this point, look again with me at:

1 John 3:20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

This verse points out a great reason for us to rejoice in the omniscience of God. How does our heart condemn us? Isn’t it when we are aware of deep dark secrets in our lives that would devastate us for them to be exposed? John is saying that when we believe we deserve condemnation, the way out is to be reminded that God is greater – more powerful – able to save and forgive us even from our darkest and deepest sins.

And not only that; but the fact that He knows everything means that His love and forgiveness of us is complete because His knowledge of our hearts is complete. He doesn’t love a public version of us, with the mask that we sinfully tend to wear due to our sin, He loves His people fully and completely, not a fake version of us but the real thing.

His love is genuine and unbreakable, it’s not as if He might find out something about you that you were trying to hide and that may compromise His love for you….no, if you are in Christ, if you are saved by grace, if you are covered with the righteousness of Christ, then God knows you completely. He knows you not only as the person you are now, still struggling in the flesh and suffering from all the effects of sin in this world, He knows you as He is sanctifying you to be through the completed work of Christ.

Matthew 10:29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.”

This passage is in the context of Jesus telling His disciples not to fear being killed. He is telling them to take comfort in knowing that not even the life of a practically worthless sparrow will end “apart from your Father.”

This implies more than just that God knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. It means that a sparrow will only fall to the ground at the exact moment God preordained it to. God knows when the sparrow falls because He has determined and ordained when the sparrow falls.

Jesus goes on in verse 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. God knows you intimately; He knows things about you that you don’t even know. “Fear not, therefore” …so then, because of what this intimate knowledge God has of you means, that you are of great value to Him, don’t be afraid of being killed, or anything else for that matter.

Notice, He is not saying that because of their value to God He won’t let them be killed, no, He is telling them to take comfort in knowing that because God knows everything about their lives and must give approval for it to happen, then they will only be killed if it is a part of God’s good and perfect plan.

It’s not just the major events of our lives that God is ordaining, it’s everything. There are no insignificant events that take place in our lives no matter how random they seem. God is at work, He has ordained all things that come to pass. Knowing this should give us a much greater sense of purpose to our lives.

God knows what will happen because He has ordained that it will happen.

Isaiah 46:9-10 I am God, and there is none like me,

10 declaring the end from the beginning

and from ancient times things not yet done,

saying, 'My counsel shall stand,

and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

Here we see the sovereignty and omnipotence of God in perfect harmony with His knowledge and omniscience. He knows all that will happen because of His power and wisdom to make it happen.

He knows everything: In one eternal and most simple act

God’s knowledge is innate and immediate. It does not come from a process of observing and learning or taking a moment to find the answer in the file cabinet of His mind. If you ask Him a question He would not need to calculate the answer. He knows everything at once, simultaneously, instantly, eternally. His knowledge is in perfect harmony with His spirituality and eternality. It does not have any spatial limitations, nor is it constricted by time. Our catechism answer states this clearly, it says, “God knows all things *eternally*.”

We only know things in successive order, but God knows the end from the beginning in one pure, simple act.

When God speaks of future events He often speaks of them in past tense. The reason the past tense is used is the certainty of the event taking place because of God’s omniscience, and omnipotence making his plan come to fruition. This is known as a prophetic past- this happens a number of times in prophecy. Let’s look quickly at just one that you should be familiar with:

**Isaiah 53:5** But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah is prophesying of the coming Messiah centuries before the birth of Christ – but stated as a completed event. For God there is no past, present, or future tense. He IS the past, present and future, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

His knowledge is eternal. This also means that it never diminishes or grows. He never learns or forgets. It does not change-it is IMMUTABLE.

**I’ve put the definition of Immutability from the WOT there in your HO**

**Immutability:** God, in His being, perfections, will, purposes, ordinations, and promises, does not change in any way. He has always been and will always be exactly the same.

Some of you who know your scripture may be thinking of passages where God says that He will remember our sins no more. This is another example of anthropomorphic language. God is communicating an idea to us in a way that helps us understand that He will no longer count our sin against us. It is the result of an action that God has taken to change OUR position in relation to Him.

Because of Christ, He changes us from dead in sin to alive in Christ, from hostile to Him to loving of Him, from enemy of God to child of God. Because of this new condition we are in- He no longer counts our sins against us, He does not think of them as an unpaid debt that we still owe Him.

It is not that the mind of God is no longer aware of something that actually happened. Our sin actually happened, but Christ actually atoned for our sin, and actually paid the penalty for it ALL so that we could stand before the throne of God, robed in the righteousness of Christ.

God doesn’t change, He changes us.

The Wisdom of God

Let’s take a minute to consider how the wisdom of God relates to His omniscience.

The glossary of your WOT says this about God’s wisdom:

*God is eternally wise and the source of all wisdom. God possesses wisdom perfectly and has decidedly ordained all things perfectly, including the best ways to accomplish His decisions. The wisdom of God is manifest in His creating, ordering, providence in, and governing of all things.*

Wisdom is different from knowledge because it has to do with the application of knowledge. The word is often used in the context of skill. In Matt’s lesson on attributes he said: “Our definition [of God’s wisdom] goes beyond the idea of God knowing all things; remember it is His omniscience that describes His knowledge. His wisdom specifies that God’s eternal decisions about what He will do always prove to be wise decisions; that is, they always will bring about the best results (from God’s ultimate perspective), and they will bring about those results through the best possible means.”

Thinking of wisdom in terms of skill is helpful. There are many things that we can know in our mind but not actually carry out with our bodies.

You can know how to read music and know the keys on a piano but that doesn’t mean you can sit down and play it with just knowledge. The skill to play comes only with hours of practice.

I have taken several lessons in how to swing a golf club and also get plenty of expert advice from all of my unskilled friends. I even offer expert advice to them, but that knowledge does not translate to me being a skilled golfer.

What about in our Christian walk? Most of us know the ten commandments but would we say that we are skilled at keeping them?

I remember someone making a comment one time about people in church who gripe and complain about other Christians and he said, “it seems pretty simple-love your neighbor.” I don’t know if this person was a Christian or not, but they had made comments in that same conversation that violated the commandment to love your neighbor. And I thought to myself, that’s the difference between knowledge and wisdom. On one hand he says, “I know what God’s word says”, and on the other, his actions say, “I really don’t have the wisdom to apply that knowledge to my own life”.

Psalms and Proverbs both say that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We will never be truly wise apart from the work of God in our lives. We need Him to reveal knowledge to us, and we equally need Him to help us apply that wisely.

Our wisdom grows with practice. God’s wisdom does not grow or improve, He doesn’t need any practice. He is eternally perfect. There is perfect unity between the knowledge of God and the wisdom of God. He is perfect in Knowledge and He is perfect in the application of His knowledge. God is eternally wise and the source of all wisdom.

There are multiple passages of scripture that affirm the wisdom of God.

**Romans 16:27** to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

**Jeremiah 10:12** It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.

**Psalm 104:24** O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Even in this fallen world we can see the glorious wisdom of God in His creation. The moon and the stars and the rotation of the earth, the seasons and the oceans tide…The anatomy of the human body, the eyeball, the ear, the sense of taste and smell, the immune system. We could go on forever looking at the perfect wisdom of God; just in regards to creation.

His wisdom is most vividly displayed in His plan of redemption.

**1 Cor. 1:21** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

In God’s perfect wisdom He has determined that the gospel message is the best and highest means to the best and highest end of His glory.

No human would have ever come up with such a scandalous plan of redemption, but we know that it is a perfect plan because we know that God had all the knowledge, wisdom, and power to have done it differently if He had needed to or wanted to.

The wisdom of God shows us how all of the attributes of God; His knowledge, sovereignty, power, goodness, love, wrath, glory, etc…are in perfect harmony.

We see what it means that God’s knowledge is perfect, it is not an empty knowledge that falls short of its full potential – it actually has no potential because it is already perfect.

I want to end by looking closer at God’s knowledge of the future.

He knows the future

That God’s knowledge includes an eternal, perfect, and complete knowledge of the future should be clear by now but I want to emphasize a few other points on this because this is where much heresy has crept into so called Christian circles.

What is incredibly important within this discussion of God’s omniscience is that His knowledge is eternal, perfect, and complete. Our definition of this term says "He never learns" and "[He] cannot grow in knowledge, understanding, or wisdom." This is a very important clarity.

What that means is that any concept of God and His knowledge that insists that at any point God had to somehow look into the future to observe events or things and learn what may come about, is seriously mistaken. This kind of concept is not biblical, and denies what God’s omniscience actually is. He doesn’t learn anything, at any time. Nothing comes about that He hasn’t first known and ordained. God knows the future because He has planned it.

Faithful Bible teachers from Church history have rightly taught this clearly and with much importance. For example, we find this clarity in the 1689 London Baptist Confession:

“God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass...[in this, it is not that] liberty or contingency of second causes are taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.”

This statement affirms both that God knows and ordains all that comes to pass, and that He does so in such a way that is concurrent with the real choices we make and the circumstances we know.

**Acts 2:23** This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God knew that the self-determined choices of evil men would crucify and kill Jesus because it was a part of His pre-determined plan. He ordained that it would happen in conjunction with the willing choices of evil men. God did not force them to do something against their will and they did not force God to adjust His plan in response to their actions.

In this, there are implications of God’s knowledge and ordination of the future that press against the human notion of so-called “free will.”

Another error that is popular with many who want to deny God’s knowledge is the false teaching that God voluntarily limits His own knowledge as a way to give human beings “true freedom” to operate outside of God’s sovereignty. They realize the truth that the only way God could know the future is if it is already determined and this upsets man’s sinful desire to be free from the rule of God. Sinful man wants to think that he is the captain of his own fate and that God cannot or will not interfere in what he wants to believe are the “sovereign” choices of man.

This way of thinking is a feeble attempt to maintain the sovereignty of God by affirming that God is capable of knowing the future but chooses not to for the sake of His plan to create people who are not bound by His will. Scripture is abundantly clear that this is not the case. In that false conception, God would cease to be God.

Besides that, it is contradictory to say that God is in control but that He has chosen to essentially tie his hands in regards to His knowledge of the future. If God does not know the future, then He is not in control of it. If He does not know the future, then He cannot be trusted. How can we believe that God will work all things together for good if He doesn’t know how things will turn out for us?

In our study of God’s sovereignty in several weeks, Matt will help us think through these things in further detail. He’ll discuss what is popularly called “free will” and how the Bible speaks to God’s decrees and our wills.

At this point, what is important to understand is that God does know all things including the future and He does not learn things about or from the future….. He doesn’t observe things and act in a response to them. Instead we know that God’s knowledge of the future is based on the fact that He has determined it according to His own plan.

closing

God’s knowledge has huge implications. If there is something new He could learn He would no longer be immutable or perfect. The exercise of His wisdom and power would not be based on all of the available information. None of His promises could be trusted. There would be no way to be sure that there is not some unforeseen event that could disrupt His plans.

That God knows everything is a great source of hope and comfort to us as Christians. Life has a way of catching us off guard. When sickness, or loss of job, loss of relationship, death of a loved one, or persecution or anything else comes in and tries to wreck us and rob us of our joy and our hope, we can find comfort in knowing that God is not surprised by anything. There are no random events that happen to us apart from our Father.

Let’s pray: