



Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

“Character of God” Series Lesson 10 – October 2, 2016

Attribute of Knowledge (Omniscience)

I. **Lesson Starters:**

Last week we finished up looking at the Communicable attribute of Invisibility. *God’s Invisibility means that God’s total essence, all of his spiritual being, will never be able to be seen by us, yet God still shows himself to us through visible, created things.*

Today we will continue looking at Communicable Attributes with the Mental Attribute of Knowledge or Omniscience.

II. **Mental Attribute of Knowledge (Omniscience)**

- May be defined as follows:
 - *God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one eternal act*
 - *Elihu says that God is the one “who is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16)*
 - *John says that God “knows everything” (1 John 3:20)*
 - *The Quality of “Knowing Everything” is called omniscience or “all-knowing” being omniscient*

God’s omniscient to “know himself” is truly remarkable considering that God’s own being is infinite or unlimited.

1 Corinthians 2:10-11

10 “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows the a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God”

The definition also says that God knows “all things actual”. This would include all things that exist in the past, present and future.

- Applies to creation - God is the one whom “no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13)
- Applies to the future – “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from the ancient times things not yet done (Isaiah 46:9)
- He knows the smallest details of our very lives, our words before we speak, our thoughts and every moment of our physical lives from the beginning of time! Truly unfathomable for us to comprehend!
 - The very number of hairs on our heads is knows (Matt 10:30)
 - He knows what you need before you ask (Matt 6:8)
 - “O Lord you have searched me and know me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar (Psalm 139:1-2)
 - “Your eyes beheld my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalm 139:16)

III. **God Knows “All Things Possible”**

God gives information about events that might happen but that do not actually come to pass.

- When David was fleeing from Saul, he rescued the city of Keilah from the Philistines and then stayed for a time at Keilah. He asked God whether Saul would come to attack him and if they came, would he defeat them (1 Samuel 23:11-13)
 - And the Lord said, “They will surrender to you”
 - David and his army acted on God’s words before it happened

The fact that God knows all things possible can also be deduced from God’s full knowledge of himself. If God fully knows himself, then he knows everything he is able to do, which includes all things.

While this earth and universe is incredibly complex and varied, there are millions upon millions of different variations of things and events that God could have created or caused to occur. God’s infinite knowledge includes detailed knowledge and understanding of what each of those other possible creations or situations would have been like and what would have happened in each of them!

The definition of omniscience also includes “*One eternal act*”. This essentially means that God is fully aware of everything in one simple act not divided into parts. God knows all things at once and fully present in his consciousness. He does not need to reason or to conclude or to ponder any answers. He never learns and never forgets anything. God’s knowledge never changes or grows.

IV. How do You Reconcile God’s Knowledge of the Future with the Reality and Degree of Freedom in our Decision?

A very difficult question arises when we consider the idea of God’s full knowledge of everything that will happen in the future and the reality and degree of freedom we have in our own actions. If God knows everything that will happen, how can our choices be all “free”? In fact some theologians have concluded that God does not know all of the future; such as the “free acts” of people that have not yet occurred, sometimes called the “contingent acts of free moral agents”. But such a position is unsatisfactory, because it essentially denies God’s knowledge of the future of human history at any given point in time. This would be in direct conflict with so many of the Old and New Testament passages concerning God’s Sovereignty, Omniscience and His successful prophecy of human events long in advance of the actual date of occurrence.

It may be helpful at this point to use words written by Augustine, who said that God has given us a “reasonable self-determination”. His statement specifically does not use the phrases “free” or “freedom” since these terms would be exceptionally difficult to define in any way that would satisfactorily describe and be in unison with God’s complete knowledge of the future. Our choices and decisions are “reasonable”; that is to say that we think about it, consciously decide what we will do and then we follow the course of action that we have chosen.

Augustine’s statement also includes the phrase “self-determination”. This affirms that our choices really do determine what will happen. It is not as if the “events” will occur regardless of our choices, but rather they do occur because of our choices. No attempt is made to define the sense in which we are “free” or “not free”. It is important that we think, choose and act; and that these thoughts, choices and actions are real and eternal significance. With all of that said, if God does know and control “all”, then we could also logically conclude that in some sense in which our choices are not absolutely free.

V. Group Questions:

1. While the typical definition of omniscience is “knowing everything” and is applied to actual choices or outcomes; have you ever thought that this also includes “knowing” the myriad of consequences or

outcomes dependent on a multitude of our options? Not just the one we make? This would be an infinite matrix of possibilities too great to fathom.

2. With God's knowledge of the future and all options and probabilities that occur under his Sovereignty, how can our "choices be free"?
3. Discuss the "degree of freedom" in our choices or self-determination in our lives?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the last sentence of the lesson "With all of that said, if God does know and control "all", then would it also logically conclude that in some sense in which our choices are not absolutely free"?

Study material is primarily taken from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, Chapter 10,-13; The Broadman Bible Commentary by the Southern Baptist Convention and Unger's Bible Dictionary.