

Jason Upchurch - Systematic Theology - Theology Proper - Omniscience and Omnipotence - Isaiah 40:25-31

Well it has been several months since we have done a sermon on systematic theology but it's time. For those of you who are newer to RBC every 6-8 weeks or so I take a sermon to work through systematic theology, or what the Bible calls doctrine. The Bible makes it clear that one of the things elders are to be teaching the church is doctrine, we are to guard our doctrine, and you are to be fortified in right doctrine.

Everyone in the church is to know good doctrine and live that out. There are no exceptions.

Titus 2:9-10 Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything, they are to be well pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering but showing all good faith. Why? So that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

Paul assumed that even slaves would have good doctrine. What he also wanted to ensure was that their lives matched that good doctrine.

We should also never be content with a simplistic understanding of the faith. **Heb 6:1** encourages us to leave elementary doctrine and go on to maturity. We don't abandon doctrine, but we should be growing in our understanding of doctrine. Or what we commonly call systematic theology.

The Bible admonishes pastors to teach doctrine and admonishes Christians to be well versed in doctrine. And so while the majority of our diet from the pulpit is systematic exposition we pause every couple of months and work through systematic theology.

We've worked through bibliology - the study of the Bible - and are now in theology proper, which is the study of God himself. Over the next 5 to 10 years we'll eventually work through all 7 categories of systematic theology so that by the end of that cycle you'll have a comprehensive understanding of doctrine over the long haul.

One last note before we begin here is that I've tried to remind you all along which is that the goal of theology is actually doxology; praise. My goal at the end of each sermon is that you love God more and worship him more. That was my experience when I was in Bible college where I learned theology for the first time and I hope for you you come away from these sermons having a greater understanding of who God is and how small you are and how much grace he has shown you.

This morning we're talking about 2 attributes of God. His omniscience and his omnipotence. God is all knowing and God is all powerful.

Omniscience

This is the first of the "omni" attributes of God. Omni means all. Science is where we get our word science but it means knowledge. So this is God's attribute of knowing all things.

Here's how most theologians say it: A perfection of God whereby he...uniquely...knows Himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal and...simple act." (Berkoff, *Systematic Theology*: Intellectual Attributes)

And, again, this isn't just an intellectual acknowledgement of God's omniscience. Since God is omniscient we should worship him and praise him for it.

We'll unpack that definition in a minute. But let's look at a couple passages. This is great passage in the middle of Isaiah where God is giving Israel comfort. And he comforts his people with his sovereignty. **Read Isaiah 40:25-31**

This is an amazing passage because God is comforting his people with his attributes. His might, his sovereignty, his eternality. But also his exhaustive knowledge.

Our lives are not hidden from God. God is not ignorant about the things we're going through. When we pray to him it's not as though we are informing him of brand new information. He knows everything about us and our lives.

And **Vs. 28** says his understanding is unsearchable. We can't even comprehend the vastness of God's own knowledge of all things.

Occasionally when I open Google Maps I have to zoom out to move over to somewhere else. And when I do it always strikes me that we live in this tiny little dot in the middle of this massive continent. And there are billions of people who live in tiny dots all over the world in just the same way.

There's some kid in Peru right now, on a field somewhere and he's dreaming what his life will be like. And God knows that child intimately and completely. He knows the innermost desires of his heart.

And there's a grandma in Germany in some small little town, worried about her children and grandchildren. She prays for their salvation and godliness. And God knows her thoughts, and God knows their thoughts. God knows what she prays before she prays it and he knows her fears and their realities more completely than they ever will.

And the same is true with all 8 billion people on the planet. God knows us all thoroughly. Because he knows all things.

Look at Isaiah 41:21-24. Here God is contrasting himself to idols. And actually the way in which he declares that he is God and they are not is in what they know about the past and about the future. **Read 21-24**

God says "Ask the idols about the past. Give us a history lesson, idols. Surely you know. What about the future? Only a divine being can know the future, so let's see then."

The godness of God, what it is to be God, hinges on whether he knows the past and the future completely and accurately. Omniscience is essential to his divine nature.

Look at Job 37:14-20. This is Elihu, the sort of secret friend of Job who basically rebukes Job and everyone before God rebukes Job. **Read 14-20**

I love that. Do we even really know how clouds work? It's the old joke that weathermen are the only people who can be wrong 50% of the time and still keep their job. We have no idea how the clouds even work.

But then Elihu adds that these works God does are wondrous. Everything God does is amazing and awesome. Every. Thing. Because he does so out of his perfect knowledge. **Read 16**

In the last chapters of Job, God will humble Job by asking Job what he knows. "Do you know this? Do you know this...?"

Do you know how the foundations of the earth were formed?
Have you seen the bottom of the ocean and know how that works?
Do you know how big the earth is or the universe?
Do you know how light works?
Do you know how snow and precipitation works?
Do you know when mountain goats give birth? Do you Job?
You don't even know why your donkey is running around loose.
Do you know how birds fly?

And then God says "Shall a fault finder contend with the almighty?"

What God is saying is that in the grand scheme of things we know nothing. Job had no idea about Satan and his involvement in the death of Job's kids. Job had no idea about why he got the boils and all of that. And God never does tell him why. God doesn't have to.

Job's on a need to know basis and he doesn't need to know.

But here's the thing: Job knows that God knows. And we know that God knows. And that's enough for us. That should settle us.

God knows exhaustively everything that is going on in the world. But more importantly, God knows exhaustively everything that's going on in your world.

He knows your financial situation.

Acts 5 Peter rebuked Ananias and Sapphira because they held back some of the money from a land sale. They were lying to the apostles and the Holy Spirit knew what was up.

He knows your good intentions when everyone else is accusing you.

Heb 4:12: The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, joints and 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 whom we must give an account.

God knows when you have good intentions. He knows you better than you know yourself.

He also knows when our intentions are bad.

Ecc. 12:13-14: The end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments. For God will bring every deed into judgment, along with every secret thing whether good or evil.

He knows your medical charts,

2 Kings 20 God knew Hezekiah would die, he knew Hezekiah would repent, he told Hezekiah to set his house in order, he gave Hezekiah 15 more years, and at the end of those 15 years Hezekiah died.

He knows what keeps you up at night,

Psalms 56:8: You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

He knows exactly how many days you will live.

He knows the difficulty you have with your family.

He knows your heart's greatest desire, the thing you would never tell anyone ever.

He knows your sorrows and your joys.

Omniscience is a glorious perfection of God.

A perfection of God whereby he...uniquely...knows Himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal and...simple act." (Berkoff, *Systematic Theology*: Intellectual Attributes)

It is glorious and beautiful and awesome that God knows all things. Some people don't think God can know all things. He can't know the future or can't know our thoughts. They want to limit his knowledge in some way.

There was a movement within evangelicalism 20 years ago called the Open Theism movement. And the idea was that if God knows the future then the future is set in stone. That means things can't change. And if things can't change then are our actions really free? Or are they determined? Are we just living in a fatalistic simulation?

And what the open theists said was "God does know all things that can be known currently. But since the future doesn't exist, God can't know the future. He has a good idea of the future because he can see everything around a certain event. But really God was just as surprised by the Titanic hitting the iceberg as everyone else. Who could have known?"

The answer is that God knew. And knows all things past, present, and future. And he knows all contingent possibilities. What does that mean? It means he not only know the actual future, but he knows all the possible future events that could have been but will never be.

I could have ran off a cliff driving here this morning. I could have put on a different shirt. We could have found a winning lottery ticket. There's a million would have/could have roads we could have taken. He knows them all.

God says to David, had you just asked me for it, I would have doubled your Kingdom. That's interesting. Had David just asked, God would have blessed him with twice the power. But he didn't. Instead he sinned and God brought consequences into his family.

But we proclaim the omniscience of God as an amazing attribute of the God we worship! He knows all things. Nothing escapes his knowledge.

He knows himself exhaustively. That's a pretty amazing statement because we can't know God exhaustively. He is infinite in every attribute and perfection.

We can't even understand ourselves. What do we really know about ourselves? How our body works, how our mind works, what our motivations are, what our past is? What our future is? We only know a fraction of our own lives.

But God knows every human who has ever lived exhaustively. He knows every detail of the cosmos exhaustively. And he knows himself exhaustively. The infinite God knows his own infiniteness with infinite perfection.

By the way, this is also one way we know the Holy Spirit is fully God because **1 Cor. 2** says that the Spirit knows the mind of God.

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.

The Holy Spirit knows the very thoughts of God. No one can know that except God himself.

Jesus, the Son of God, also perfectly knows the will of the Father.

Matt. 11:27: All things have been handed over to me by my Father - that's a big deal - and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

The Father knows the Son perfectly. The Son knows the Father perfectly. And it's only the Son who allows anyone to have any real knowledge of the Father.

Jesus says every hair of our head is numbered.

Psalms 147:4: He knows the number of all the stars, he gives to them all their names.

The best we can tell there are hundreds of billions of galaxies and in each galaxy there are hundreds of millions of stars. And that's just what we can see. And God knows them all.

RC Sproul once said this about the omniscience of God. I love this: "To know that God knows everything about me and yet loves me is indeed my ultimate consolation."

God knows perfectly everything about you. Good and bad. And yet if you are in Christ, he loves you and will always love you. That's an amazing comfort. An amazing consolation.

Turn to Romans 11:33-36. Here's how Paul sums it up. **Read**

The knowledge of God should always lead us to this praise.

2) Omnipotence

Omni meaning all. Potent meaning power. God is all powerful.

What this specifically means is that "God is able to do all that he wills to do." That's an important definition because there are some things God cannot do.

God cannot lie. He is truth and so he cannot definitionally be not truth.

God is holy and so he cannot do anything that is unholy or sinful.

God is unchanging so God cannot make himself stronger or weaker.

There's the old children's question: Can God make a rock so big he can't lift it? And the answer is no. Not because he's stronger than his ability to create, but because he would never set his own attributes against themselves.

God is Mighty. He is often simply Called "Almighty" - El Shaddai in the Hebrew. Yahweh, the god of heaven and earth, is definitionally powerful.

That's why in the Apostles' Creed we say "I believe in God, the Father, what? Almighty.

And the Son is Almighty and the Spirit is Almighty. The triune God is able to do anything according to the will of God.

Turn to Psalm 44:1-8. How did Israel win the promised land? Was it their blood, sweat and tears? **Read**

God drove them out. God conquered. And he did so because he delighted in his people. **Read 3**

Jeremiah 32:17: Ah! Lord Yahweh. It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you!

All that God does, he does because he is powerful. Think about that. God made the billions of galaxies. Is there anything that's too difficult for him?

When you're asking God for a job - and he knows what you want because he's omniscient - is it really hard for him to get that done?

When you want God to resolve some situation in your life, could he do it? Of course he could. He made Betelgeuse and the Andromeda galaxy by just speaking them into existence.

I mean this is Paul's defense of the resurrection of Jesus in the gospel in **Acts 26:8:** Why do any of you think it incredible that God raises the dead?

Which is an entirely reasonable question. If God is God, and he is, then he can do anything he wants, and he does, why is raising the dead out of the question? It's not.

And this ties into the decrees of God where he has ordained all things that will come to pass. But this is essentially the ability of God to bring all things to pass exactly how he wants to.

God can make stones worship him according to **Matthew 3:9.**

Nothing is impossible with God, according to Gabriel in **Luke 1:37**. Remember he was talking about a virgin who had never known a man becoming pregnant.

Turn to Psalm 115:1-3: Read

One of the most frustrating things about being human is that we have limitations. We can only do so many things. We're so weak that God built into the universe a whole day of rest each week even before the fall.

And now after the fall we struggle. We get sick. We get have heart attacks and strokes. We get old. We get hurt. We're not strong enough to lift something. We're too tired to get all the chores done.

Even if we want to accomplish something, have the ability, the motivation, the finances, it still could be that God providentially keeps us from it.

We are incredibly limited in what we can do. But God is unlimited in his power. It's not just that nothing is too difficult for him. Literally nothing is difficult for him. It's not like there's a drain on God's power when he acts.

When he brought down the Egyptian army in the Red Sea he didn't need a break.

When he destroyed the Assyrian army he didn't need to take a sabbatical.

He's not exhausted at the end of the day keeping up with our prayer requests and keeping the sun in the sky and the universe rotating around in space.

He calls out the stars by name. He holds them all in his hands.

Turn to Daniel 4:34-37. This is one of my favorite passages on the omnipotence of God because it comes from the mouth of the most powerful man on the planet at the time: Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

If you remember he had proclaimed his own might and glory and majesty. And God humbled him by sending him to live like an ox in the field for 7 years. And by God's grace he restored Nebuchadnezzar to his position of authority. And here's what he has to say. **Read 34-37**

God's dominion is over all things. Abraham Kuyper said "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

And it is eternally his. It's everlasting. It's not like God was in control in the Garden and now it's spiraling out of control. It's not like it'll get put back together only in the New Heavens and New Earth. No, right now - just as always - he has had dominion over the whole thing.

And all of humanity if we were lined up on one side and God was on another we would account for exactly nothing against him. That is how big and massive and powerful and exalted the God of the universe is.

And so he does whatever he wants according to his will. The host of heaven - all the angel armies - are nothing against God's power. The mighty glorious angels who are so beautiful and mighty and splendid that even the apostle John bows down to in worship because they are so terribly awesome are nothing compared to the Almighty.

And his power and rule is such that no one will ever, ever, ever hold God to account. No one will ever say to the the Almighty "What have you done?" Job found that out the hard way.

What's the response to a God like that? It's to praise and honor and extol the King of heaven. **Read 37**

Listen, this is the God who says in Christ he is for us. He is on our side. When we ask of him he can do it if he wills to do it. Whatever your prayer is, it's not too hard. In fact our prayers are probably too small. Our small prayers probably indicate we have a small God in mind.

No; our God can fulfill the greatest most audacious prayers we could possibly make and then we can say with Paul he is able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than we could ever ask or think. Why? Because he is the Almighty, sovereign.

All his work are right. All his ways are just.

And one day we will behold the greatness of the beauty of the Lord in all his powerful glory. And we will say Hallelujah!

Pray