

GOD'S PERSPECTIVE – OMNISCIENCE

A man selling vacuum cleaners knocked on the door of a remote farmhouse. When the lady of the house opened the door, he walked in and dumped a bag of dirt on the floor. "Now," boasted the salesman, "I want to make a bargain with you. If this super-duper, new vacuum cleaner doesn't pick up every bit of this dirt, I'll eat what's left." "Here's a spoon," said the farmer's wife, "we don't have any electricity." That man thought he knew what he was doing but obviously did not. Has there ever been a time in your life when you wished you knew more than you did or had more information?

Psalms 139:1 For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. 2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. 3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. 5 You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Today we are beginning our series Getting to Know God. Over the next 4 weeks we will be looking at God's divine attributes. Tony Evans writes that there are three attributes which always work in tandem: God knows what needs to be done, that's omniscience. He's always wherever He needs to be in order to do whatever needs to be done, that's omnipresence. He has the power to do it, that's omnipotence. Today we will look at the first of these which is omniscience.

When we say that God is omniscient, we are saying that God is ALL KNOWING. God knows EVERYTHING. His knowledge is complete. He knows everything that has ever happened and everything that ever will happen. This scripture says three things about God's knowledge;

1. The SOURCE of God's Knowledge (vs. 1) - You have searched me

The word used here for SEARCH literally means TO DIG or to penetrate deeply or examine intimately. It was often applied to the search for precious metals and gems. Have you ever seen someone panning for gold? They sift through the dirt very carefully to find that gold or precious gem. Another way to look at this word is to picture an archeological dig. Whenever they think they come across something of value, the archeologists and their helpers remove the dirt ever so carefully, scrutinizing everything very carefully and gently. They brush everything the dust off very carefully, catalog it accurately. And they do this with the entire area. They leave no stone unturned. That's a picture of how God searches us and how God thoroughly knows us.

What I want you to see is this searching is not just factual but intentional. God wants to know you.

During the last census, a mother was asked by a census taker how many children she had. She had a very large family, so she started to go through all her children, "Oh, let's see now, there's Billy, and there's Harry, and there's Martha, and there's..." And the census taker got a little impatient and annoyed with her, "Never mind their names, just give me the number!" Well, the mother got very indignant and said to the man, "They don't have numbers, they all have names!"

We moved to Kuwait just a few years after the Gulf war. My first car in Kuwait was one that had bullet holes in it because it survived that war. Just before the start of the Gulf war the pastor of the church had gone home for a summer break and a visiting pastor was living on the church compound. He awoke to the sound of gunfire. Iraqi soldiers came into the house and told everyone to stay where they were. At some point they were able to get out and into the car.

They drove out onto the Gulf Road right in front of a group of Iraqi tanks and made their way to the US Embassy where they were stranded for the duration of the war. During the occupation of Kuwait, the American Military stayed in touch with the people who were stranded in the embassy. Every week they would go up to the roof of the embassy and place a tennis ball, with the label pointing up. Later in the week when the government would call to reassure everyone that they were watching them they would tell them label on the tennis ball – it was seen by the satellites that were circling overhead. I remember speaking to that pastor and he said how reassuring it was to know that someone was watching over them.

Likewise, we can take comfort in that fact that God has searched us and knows us. He is watching over us and desires a relationship with us.

2. The SCOPE of God's Knowledge (vs. 2-5) - You are familiar with all my ways

God knows everything that there is to know about each one of us. It says here that God is familiar with ALL our ways. What does that mean? What is the scope of His knowledge?

a. God Knows What We DO – You know when I sit and when I rise

God sees and knows everything we do. There is nothing that we can hide from Him. We can try to hide our secrets and sins from one another, but you cannot hide your sins from God. He knows.

One of the good things about living in Kuwait was that there was no drinking. Alcohol was forbidden because it was an Islamic nation. I remember one time I was taking a flight to Bahrain. I was sitting next to a Kuwaiti man. As soon as the airplane took off the man had reached into his bag and was drinking whiskey. I asked him why he was doing that, it was something that was forbidden by God. He told me "It's OK, God does not see me in the air."

I heard this story about a farmer who had a small patch of corn that hadn't done very well one year so he decided he was going to "borrow" some corn from his neighbor's field which had a much better yield of corn. So with a large sack underneath his arm, he took his son with him to "borrow" some of his neighbor's corn. He quietly went to the farthest corner of the field. He looked carefully to the right, then to the left, then ahead of him, then behind him. As he was reaching out to get that first ear of corn, his son piped up, "Daddy, you forgot to look up!"

God knows everything we have ever done and everything we will ever do. But more than that...

b. God Knows What We THINK - You perceive my thoughts from afar

God not only sees everything we do, he also knows everything we think. Not just our acts but the thinking behind those acts. He knows our thoughts, our aims, our intents, our motives for why we think it. Even we often don't understand our own intentions, but God does. He is the only One who does. He not only knows them, He fully understands them. He knows all about our thoughts, why we think them, where they come from and how they affect us ... He knows all of that.

Matthew 5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Sin is born in the mind and heart. Jesus reminded us that it is not just what you DO that is sinful but also what you THINK. Jesus says here that it is not only what you do with your hands that is wrong but also what you choose to take in and think through your eyes. This is so true when it comes to pornography. You cannot sin mentally and not have consequences relationally. What we do flows out of what we think.

Matthew 5:27-28 You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Pornography is a 40 billion dollar a year business. A few years ago Chuck Colson died. I remember a story I once heard about him. Chuck had appeared on a television program, talking about criminal justice reforms. A few days he got a call from Jack Eckerd, a businessman from Florida, the founder of the Eckerd Drug chain, the second largest drug chain in America. He saw him on television and asked him to go to Florida. He felt Florida had a criminal justice crisis, and wanted Chuck to help him to do something about it. So he did. They took Jack Eckerd's Lear jet all over the State of Florida advocating criminal justice reforms, and everywhere they went Jack Eckerd would introduce Chuck to the crowds and say, "This is Chuck Colson, my friend; I saw him on a television program. He's born again, I'm not. I wish I were." And then he'd sit down. They would get back on the airplane and Chuck would tell him about Jesus. Over and over he told him. They went through a book by R. C. Sproul and C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity. Still he used the same greeting. Finally a year later Jack Eckerd was reading the story of Watergate and Chuck's book Loving God, and decided that Jesus was who He claimed to be and gave his life to Christ.

The first thing he did was to walk into one of his drugstores and walked down through the book shelves and he saw Playboy and Penthouse. And he'd seen it there many times before, but it never bothered him before. Now he saw them with new eyes. He went back to his office. He called in his president. He said, "Take Playboy and Penthouse out of my stores. The president said, "You can't mean that, Mr. Eckerd. We make three million dollars a year on those books." He said, "Take 'em out of my stores." And in 1,700 stores across America, by one man's decision, those magazines were removed from the shelves because a man had given his life to Christ.

The story did not end there. Jack Eckerd began calling the CEOs of other retail store chains asking that those magazines be removed. No one was willing, until they noticed that Eckerd Drugs began to get floods of people coming in to buy things at Eckerd's because they'd taken Playboy and Penthouse out. Over the next year 16,000 retail outlets stopped selling pornography because one man recognized that sin isn't just what you do, it is also what you think.

c. God Knows What We SAY - Before a word is spoken, You know it completely

Because God knows what is in our minds as well as what is in our hearts, he knows the words we speak before we even speak them because what comes out of our mouths is first birthed in our minds and hearts. Even before it comes out, God knows it. That is amazing! I don't always know what I'm going to say before I say it, do you? But God does!

Think about all of the dumb things I have said in my life that I wish I had not said. "How could I have said that?! How dumb was that?" Because I speak in public quite a bit I have said some really dumb stuff over the years. Maybe you can relate to that. But, you know what, I never caught God by surprise. He knew what I was going to say before I even said it.

And He never stopped loving me, even when I've said some things I later regretted. How come He keeps on loving me? Because He is God and He is love. He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world and He will never let go of me. What a wonderful Lord! Amen? What an awesome God!

d. God Knows What We NEED - You hem me in ... you have laid your hand upon me

God not only knows what we do, what we think and what we say, He knows what we need. Because He completely knows us He knows what we need. The phrase "you have laid your hand upon me" contains a wonderful truth. To lay your hand on someone in the Old Testament was to bestow on them blessing and offer them your protection. And that's exactly what God does for us. In laying His hand on us He is saying, "I'm here with you. I know what you need and I'm ready to help. I got this."

God knows what you are going through. I don't know it. The person sitting beside you may not know it but God knows it. Not only does God know it but, as we are going to talk about in the coming weeks, He is there with you through it and has the power to do something about it. I am sure that you faced many challenges in 2014, and there will be more in 2015. The good news is that God knows everything this year will throw at us and He has promised to walk with us through it all.

3. The SPECTACLE of God's Knowledge (vs. 6) - too wonderful for me, too lofty to attain

So how should we respond to the fact of God's omniscience? I think there are two natural responses.

First, we need to remember in humility that, while God may know everything, we do not. Isn't it a relief to know that because God knows everything, I don't have to. You and I do not have to have all the answers. Sometimes all we can do is trust God's word and whisper mystery.

There are people today who, when they speak, seem to suggest that they are 100% certain of absolutely everything. Yes, there are core doctrines of the Christian faith that we all hold to be true. I am not talking about these issues. I am talking about the secondary issues – when and how will the second coming take place etc. I remember when I went to seminary. I felt I already had a very good understanding of the Bible and figured a few courses would help even more. Two masters degrees and 4 years later I left realizing how much I still did not understand. It is OK not to have all the answers.

A Bible college student came to preacher Charles Spurgeon one day, greatly concerned that he could not grasp the meaning of certain verses in the Bible. The noted preacher replied kindly but firmly, "Young man, allow me to give you this word of advice. Give the Lord credit for knowing things you don't understand." God knows everything!

Second, since God knows everything we can trust Him to do what is right in our lives. There are times when we find ourselves in a situation that we can't find a way out of. There are times in our lives that we will suffer and wonder why God has allowed this to happen to us. Those are the times that we need to trust in God's plan.

On December 29 of 2000 British Airways 2069 left London's Gatwick Airport and everything seemed to be going quite well at first. Six hours into the flight some of the passengers were asleep, some of the reading lights were on, everyone was comfortably settled in when suddenly everyone was jarred awake by a violent dip of the airplane. They heard a scuffle up near the front and in the cockpit there was a lot of chaos. Then about as suddenly as the plane dipped it had leveled out and seemed to have recovered.

The problem was that a 27 year old deranged and suicidal man had rushed into the cockpit and momentarily gained control of the plane. When the pilots jumped on him they were able to pull him away from the controls for just a moment and then he began to punch them and pull the and even began to bite them. He regained control of the airplane and locked himself onto the controls and leaned forward and pushed the 747 into a deep and violent plunge. At this point everyone in the cabin was absolutely chaotic, people were yelling and screaming people were praying out loud, people writing notes to their loved ones. They were certain they were doomed as this 747 plunged toward the ground.

Earlier that day a man by the name of Clark Bynum had been traveling from the United States to London's Gatwick airport. Clark was on his way to a short-term missions trip, he was a preacher from South Carolina and he was going to preach to a couple thousand teenagers who were assembled for a rally in Uganda. Because of bad weather his plane had to land at Heathrow and because of this he missed his flight to Uganda. Clark was discouraged and wrote in his diary "Well Lord, off to a bad start. The adventure continues.." To make up for it, the airline had put him on flight 2069 to Kenya. Since the flight was fully booked, the only seats they had were in first class, on the upper deck of the 747 right outside the door to the cockpit. The preacher that God had redirected to this flight happened to also be six foot seven and a former athlete from Clemson. He was huge and in the prime of his life.

As the plane plunged downward a second time Clark heard the scuffle in the cockpit and immediately dove into the fray. Seeing the madman clenched to the controls of the plane the six foot seven preacher popped that guy out of the cockpit like a bad tooth. He literally threw him on the floor between the first couple of rows and jumped on him and with the help of his preaching partner subdued this man and had him quickly tied up by his hands. The plane in this deep descent was then regained by the pilot who took the plane and leveled it back out and he later said that if the plane would've continued at that descent for 2 or 3 more seconds he would not have been able to recover it. There were 398 people that were saved that day, because a man missed his flight due to bad weather.

We celebrate at stories like this don't we? They are miracles of God's divine intervention. Clarke was never the same after that incident. He had many opportunities to share his testimony after it. In fact, it led to him going into the ministry a few years later.

So how does the story end? He came down with cancer and died in 2007 leaving behind a wife and 4 children. There are times I do not understand God's plan. I don't know why God would allow Clark Bynum to get cancer and die. I do know that God knows everything and that God is in control. Jesus said;

Luke 12:6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

God knows everything, and he is in control. He knows what 2015 will hold for us. Let's trust that He knows best.