Thoughts on
The Omniscience of God
By
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A  God, who knows the beginning from the end, knows, therefore, all that is in between. He could not safely see us through our individual allotments of “all these things” that shall give us experience if He did not first know “all things.”

Below the scripture that declares that God knows “all things” there is no footnote reading “except that God is a little weak in geophysics”! We do not worship a God who simply forecasts a generally greater frequency of earthquakes in the last days before the second coming of His Son; He knows precisely when and where all these will occur. God has even prophesied that the Mount of Olives will cleave in twain at a precise latter-day time as Israel is besieged. (Zechariah 14:4.)

There are no qualifiers, only flat and absolute assertions of the omniscience of God such as these: “The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all.” (1 Chronicles 28:9.) The psalmist said that the Lord’s “understanding is infinite.” (Psalm 147:5.) “Now we are sure that thou knowest all things.” (John 16:30.) “The Lord knoweth all things which are to come.” (Words of Mormon 1:7.)

Mortals should not aspire to teach God that He is not omniscient by adding qualifiers that He has never used in the scriptures. Job rightly asked, “Shall any teach God knowledge?” (Job 21:22.)

The Lord could not know all things that are to come if He did not know all things that are past as well as all things that are present. Alma described God’s “foreknowledge” of all things and said also that God “comprehendeth all things.” (Alma 13:3; 26:35.) Indicating that omniscience is a hallmark of divinity, Helaman wrote, “Except he was a God he could not know of all things.” (Helaman 9:41.)

The Lord Himself said that He “knoweth all things, for all things are present” before Him. (D&C 38:2.) We read, too, that “all things are present with me, for I know them all.” (Moses 1:6.)

Therefore, God’s omniscience is not solely a function of prolonged and discerning familiarity with us -- but of the stunning reality that the past and present and future are part of an “eternal now” with God! (Joseph Smith, History of the Church 4:597.) (All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience, page 7,8)

B  Some find the doctrines of the omniscience and foreknowledge of God troubling because these seem, in some way, to constrict their individual agency. This concern springs out of a failure to distinguish between how it is that God knows with perfection what is to come but that we do not know, thus letting a very clear and simple doctrine get obscured by our own finite view of things. . .

Ever to be emphasized, however, is the reality that God’s “seeing” is not the same thing as His “causing” something to happen. (All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience, page 20)

C  God is never surprised (fantasy stories to the contrary) by unexpected arrivals in the spirit world because of unforeseen deaths. But we must always distinguish between God’s being able to foresee and His causing or desiring something to happen, a very important distinction! God foresaw the fall of His beloved David but did not cause it. (See D&C 132:39.) Sending for Bathsheba was David’s decision, and even her battle-weary husband Uriah’s sleeping loyalty by David’s door was not enough to bring a by then devious and determined David to his senses. (2 Samuel 11:9.)

By foreseeing, God can plan and His purposes can be fulfilled, but He does this in a way that does not in the least compromise our individual free agency, any more than an able meteorologist causes the weather rather than forecasts it. Part of the reason for this is our forgetfulness of our earlier experiences and the present inaccessibility of the knowledge and understanding we achieved there. The basic reason, of course, is that, as we decide
and act, we do not know what God knows. Our decisions are made in our context, not His. (All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience, page 18-19)

D Traditional discussions of omniscience ignore the fact that this attribute is much more than God’s simply noticing and observing everything as it happens. It is a remarkable thing for God to notice every sparrow that falls. But God could be fully noticing and aware -- and yet still be surprised, along with the rest of us. Yet the living God is aware of all things before they unfold. This supernal dimension of knowledge is a part of omniscience!

Because of His omniscience and foreknowledge, God is, therefore, able to see His plan unfold safely. If He were less than omniscient and did not, in fact, operate out of perfect foreknowledge, His plan of salvation would by now be in shambles. (All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience, page 18)

E Did Jesus not understand that we would, at times, feel intimidated by the very perfectness of His life? Of course He knew and knows! His omniscience -- perfect knowledge -- about the long developmental distance we have to travel only makes His entreaties and invitations to us all the more significant and encouraging.

He understands completely! Hence, His assurances are completely reliable; He will lead us along, giving us here a little, there a little. He knows perfectly our bearing capacity as well as our individual distances yet to be traveled.

Jesus’ kindness and concern for His disciples can be noticed in His efforts to help them establish a wise pace even in their diligence. The wise use of time helps to fit us for eternity. On one occasion, when the Twelve had given their personal reports to the Savior, He could see how harried and wearied they were. When the press of the crowd upon them was so great that they could scarcely eat, Jesus took them apart to rest for awhile in a solitary place. Who more than the Lord of the Sabbath understands about the need for rest?

Happily, His foreknowledge of our failures does not cause Christ to give up concerning us without providing us with the opportunity to repent and to follow Him. His foreknowledge rests upon His perfect awareness of our weaknesses and capabilities, while His relentlessly redeeming love makes of Him a true and perfect Shepherd.

The Father’s entire plan of salvation has taken into account beforehand our prospective successes and failures, so that His plan will be fully executed and His purposes completely fulfilled through Christ. Unlike us, God can see the end from the beginning, “and thus it is”!

Thus we are to “confess” God’s hand “in all things.” This clearly does not mean that He causes or approves of all things that occur; rather, it means that He has taken all things into account from the beginning, and His purposes will still prevail. A failure to confess this is a failure to acknowledge God’s attributes of omniscience and omnipotence -- another example of not knowing “what we worship.” Such is evidence of defective faith in a defective deity -- like saying a god exists but does not preside, cares but cannot deliver, and has identity but not sovereignty.

One searches in vain for accurate analogies to portray what it is like for us in our own imperfections to ponder His perfections; clearly it is not for finiteness to comprehend infiniteness. For, in addition to believing in God, we are counseled to accept His omniscience, to believe “that man doth not comprehend all things which the Lord can comprehend.”

Likewise, when the Lord asks us to confess His hand in all things, He is not seeking our ritualistic incantation concerning His powers. Again, He is after realism in us, including our acknowledgment that His omniscience has made allowance even for human errors of which He does not approve, but which are not allowed to frustrate His overall plan. We can count on His plans even when He cannot count on us! (Even As I Am, pp. 56-57)