

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 4: THE INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson 13

The Omniscience and Wisdom of God

The God Who Knows All Things and Orders All Things Wisely

Key Texts: Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 46:9–10; Romans 11:33–34; Hebrews 4:13

His Understanding Is Without Number — The Omniscient and All-Wise God

Dr. Joshua Nichols

Pastor, Theologian, Author

faithfultotheword.com

Series Verse

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Introduction

In Lessons 9 through 12 we have traversed the first four of the great incommunicable attributes of God: aseity (the self-existent God who depends on nothing outside Himself), immutability (the unchanging God whose character is the most reliable reality in the universe), eternity and infinity (the God who transcends all temporal and spatial limitation), and omnipresence (the God who is fully present to every point in the creation He transcends). Each of these attributes has pressed us deeper into the magnificent and vertiginous territory of the divine being, straining our creaturely categories to their limits while filling our souls with the wonder that belongs to genuinely theological encounter with the living God.

Now, in Lesson 13, the final lesson of Unit 4 and the concluding lesson of our study of the incommunicable attributes, we take up two of the most awe-inspiring and most practically significant perfections of the divine mind: omniscience and wisdom. These two attributes are distinct but inseparable. Omniscience is the attribute of divine knowing: God knows all things, past, present, and future, actual and possible, great and small, public and private, spoken and unspoken, exhaustively, immediately, and eternally. Wisdom is the attribute of divine ordering: God not only knows all things, but He orders all things according to the most perfect ends by the most perfect means, governing the whole of history and the whole of every individual life in a manner that is simultaneously sovereign, good, and unfathomably deep.

The series verse of this entire study, Romans 11:33–34, is, fittingly, the most magnificent biblical doxology of these two attributes together: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” Paul has just completed eleven chapters of the most sustained and rigorous theological argument in all of Scripture, and the culmination of his argument is not a proposition but an eruption of wonder, the wonder of a mind that has been brought to the edge of the divine wisdom and knowledge and stands there, undone, unable to produce anything more adequate than praise. Let this be the spirit in which we approach Lesson 13: not merely to learn about omniscience and wisdom, but to be brought, by the study of them, to the same place where Paul arrived, the place of worship.

I. Defining Omniscience: The Exhaustive, Eternal, Immediate Knowledge of God

Divine omniscience is the attribute affirming that God knows all things, not most things, not all things that a very informed being might know, but literally all things, without exception, without limit, and without the possibility of ignorance or error. The traditional theological definition distinguishes several dimensions of this all-encompassing knowledge.

First, omniscience is comprehensive in its scope. It encompasses all things past (every event that has occurred, every word spoken, every thought formed, every deed done across the whole of human and cosmic history), all things present (every current state of affairs in the universe, from the most distant galaxy to the innermost chamber of every human heart), and all things future (every event that will occur, every decision that will be made, every consequence that will unfold, from now to the consummation of all things and beyond). Psalm 147:5 declares: “Good is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite” (NASB 1995), the Hebrew *’ein mispar*, “without number,” applied to divine understanding, declares that God’s knowledge has no outer limit, no frontier of ignorance beyond which the unknown begins.

Second, omniscience extends to all things actual and all things possible. This is the dimension of divine knowledge that the scholastic tradition called God’s knowledge of possibles or His natural knowledge, His awareness not merely of what has happened and what will happen, but of every possible course of events that could happen under every possible set of conditions, including the full consequences of every possible free human choice under every possible circumstance. This is the knowledge implied in David’s observation in Psalm 139:4: “For there is not a word on my tongue, but, behold, O LORD, You know it altogether” (NASB 1995), God knows not merely what David says but what he might say; not merely what he does but what he might do.

Third, omniscience penetrates to the most intimate and most concealed dimensions of creaturely existence. Hebrews 4:13 provides the most searching New Testament declaration of this penetrating quality:

“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”, Hebrews 4:13, NASB 1995

The imagery is striking: “open and laid bare” translates the Greek *tetrachēlismenā*, from a root that may refer to the practice of bending back the neck of a sacrificial animal to expose its throat, or more broadly to the idea of anything exposed, bared, and utterly without concealment. Every creature, every thought, every motive, every hidden intention, every secret sin, every whispered prayer, every anguished cry that never found a human ear, is open and laid bare before the eyes of God. Nothing is hidden. Nothing is concealed. Nothing escapes His notice. The comprehensive, penetrating omniscience of God leaves no aspect of creaturely existence unexposed.

II. God’s Knowledge Is Not Acquired or Learned: Inherent, Immediate, and Simultaneous

One of the most theologically significant and most frequently overlooked aspects of divine omniscience is the mode in which God knows. Human knowledge is characteristically acquired, sequential, and dependent on external sources: we learn by observation, by inference, by testimony, by experience. We know some things before we know others; we learn new things as time unfolds and new information becomes available; our knowledge is always dependent on some prior cognitive process, sensation, memory, reasoning, that mediates it to our minds. We begin in ignorance and arrive at knowledge through a process.

God's knowledge is of a categorically different character. It is not acquired; He has not come to know things by learning them. It is not sequential; He does not know some things before other things in the way that a learner works through a curriculum. It is not derived from any external source, no observer reports to Him, no informant updates Him, no experience teaches Him something He did not already know. His knowledge is inherent, immediate, and simultaneous: it belongs to His nature as essentially as His being belongs to His nature; it is immediate in that it requires no mediating cognitive process; and it is simultaneous in that all things, all events across the whole of time and all possibilities across the whole of logical space, are known by Him in a single, eternal, undivided act of omniscient cognition.

Isaiah 40:13–14 presses this point with rhetorical force, anticipating the apostle Paul's quotation of it in Romans 11:34:

“Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?”, Isaiah 40:13–14, NASB 1995

The questions are rhetorical and admit only one answer: no one. No counselor has informed the LORD. No teacher has given Him understanding. No informant has instructed Him in the way of knowledge. His knowledge is self-contained, self-sufficient, and entirely independent of any creaturely contribution. He does not consult; He knows. He does not inquire; He is omniscient. He does not learn; He is the One from whom all learning ultimately derives.

The practical implication of this mode of divine knowing is enormous for prayer, for providence, and for theodicy. It means that God has never been surprised by any event in the history of the universe. The fall of Adam, the Exodus, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the conversion of every soul, the death of every sparrow, the falling of every hair, the rising and falling of every empire, all of it was known to God from before the foundation of the world in the full depth of its detail, consequence, and significance. Not approximately. Not in outline. Not with a general sense of how things would unfold. In the precise, exhaustive, simultaneous omniscience of the eternal God.

III. God's Knowledge of the Future: Foreknowledge, Middle Knowledge, and the Reformed Response

The most theologically contested dimension of divine omniscience is God's knowledge of the future, specifically, His knowledge of future free human choices. The controversy arises at the intersection of two convictions that both command strong biblical support: the conviction that God knows the future exhaustively (omniscience), and the conviction that human beings make genuine choices for which they are genuinely responsible (human freedom). How these two convictions relate to each other has generated some of the most sustained and most sophisticated theological debate in the history of Christian thought.

A. Simple Foreknowledge

The simplest account of God's knowledge of future free choices is the doctrine of simple foreknowledge: God knows what every free agent will freely choose to do, and He has known this from eternity, without that foreknowledge causally determining the choice. On this view, God's foreknowledge is like perfect memory of the future: He sees what will happen, but His seeing does not make it happen. The Arminian tradition has generally preferred this view, arguing that God's eternal knowledge of future free choices is compatible with genuine human freedom because the foreknowledge does not cause the choice.

B. Middle Knowledge (Molinism)

The Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina proposed a more sophisticated account in the sixteenth century, which has been revived and defended in contemporary theology by Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, and others. Molina distinguished three "moments" in God's knowledge: natural knowledge (God's knowledge of all necessary truths and all possibilities), middle knowledge (God's knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, what every free creature would freely do in every possible circumstance), and free knowledge (God's knowledge of the actual world He has chosen to create, given the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom). By knowing what every creature would freely do in every possible situation (middle knowledge), God can actualize the world He desires to bring about while preserving the genuine freedom of every creature's choice.

Molinism has attracted considerable attention because it appears to offer a philosophically sophisticated account of the compatibility of divine sovereignty and human freedom. Its most significant problem, from the Reformed perspective, is the grounding objection: what is the ground for the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom? Molinism requires that there be truths of the form "If creature C were in circumstances S, C would freely choose A," and that God knows these truths. But if the choice in question is genuinely free (not determined by any prior cause), then there appears to be no fact about what C would do that God could know prior to God's decision about which world to actualize. The counterfactual truths that Molinism requires seem to have no ontological grounding.

C. The Reformed Response: Foreknowledge Grounded in Foreordination

The Reformed tradition, following Augustine, Calvin, and the Westminster divines, grounds God's foreknowledge in His foreordination: God knows the future because He has ordained the future. His knowledge of future events is not like a spectator's knowledge of events unfolding on a stage over which he has no control; it is the architect's knowledge of the building he has designed and determined to construct. The distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination is not a distinction between two independent divine acts, but a distinction in our way of speaking about a single, comprehensive, sovereign divine act by which God has determined the whole of history from before its beginning.

Isaiah 46:9–10 provides the most direct biblical statement of this Reformed account:

"Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be

established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.”, Isaiah 46:9–10, NASB 1995

God declares the end from the beginning not because He is a very well-informed spectator of a future He has not determined, but because He is the sovereign Author of the future He is declaring. His declaration is grounded in His purpose: “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.” The foreknowledge is inseparable from the foreordination; the certainty of the future is inseparable from the sovereignty of the God who has purposed it.

The Reformed account does not eliminate the genuine reality of human freedom and responsibility. God’s foreordination and the creature’s genuine choice are not in competition; they operate at different levels of causation, in the manner that the tradition calls concurrence. God’s sovereign purpose is the ultimate cause of every event; the creature’s genuine choice is the proximate cause. Both are real; neither eliminates the other. This is the mystery of concurrence that the Scripture affirms without resolving, most strikingly in the declaration that those who crucified Christ did what “Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:28, NASB 1995), while remaining genuinely culpable for what they did.

IV. Omniscience and Human Responsibility: The Compatibility of Two Biblical Certainties

The relationship between divine omniscience and human freedom and responsibility is one of the most persistently challenging questions in Christian theology, and it is a question that no fully satisfying answer resolves from within the resources of creaturely reason alone. The Scripture holds both convictions with equal firmness, without apologizing for the apparent tension between them, and the faithful student of Theology Proper must do the same.

The biblical testimony to divine omniscience is comprehensive and unqualified. God knows all things, including what free human beings will freely choose to do. He knew before Judas was born that Judas would betray Jesus; He knew before Pharaoh was born that Pharaoh would harden his heart; He knew before Peter was born that Peter would deny Him three times. The certainty of the foreknowledge is not in question.

The biblical testimony to human responsibility is equally comprehensive and unqualified. Judas was held responsible for his betrayal (Matthew 26:24). Pharaoh was held responsible for his hardening (Exodus 9:34). Peter was held responsible for his denial (Luke 22:61–62). The culpability of the human agent is not diminished by the certainty of the divine foreknowledge. The Scripture holds these two certainties together with serene confidence, never regarding them as a contradiction to be resolved but as a mystery to be acknowledged.

The compatibilist account, the position that genuine human freedom and divine sovereignty are compatible, is the position most consistent with the full biblical testimony. On this account, a free human choice is not one that could have been otherwise in an absolute, libertarian sense (uncaused, undetermined by any prior factor), but one that flows from the agent’s own desires, values, and character without

external compulsion. God can ordain that an agent will freely choose what He has purposed without that ordination constituting compulsion, because the ordination works through the agent's own nature and character rather than against it.

The practical implication of this compatibilist account is that the believer can simultaneously affirm: God has ordained all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11); and, I am genuinely responsible for my choices and genuinely culpable for my sins. Both are true. The sovereignty of God does not reduce the believer to a puppet; the responsibility of the human agent does not reduce God to a spectator. The two truths are held together in the mystery of a relationship between Creator and creature that no creaturely philosophical framework fully captures, and which the Scripture presents not as a problem to be solved but as a reality to be acknowledged and a mystery to be worshipped.

V. The Wisdom of God: Not Merely Knowing All Things, but Ordering All Things Perfectly

Having established the omniscience of God, His exhaustive, eternal, immediate, simultaneous knowledge of all things, we now turn to the attribute that is omniscience's most exalted companion and its most practically significant application: the wisdom of God. Omniscience and wisdom are not the same thing, and the distinction between them is of enormous theological and pastoral importance.

Omniscience is the attribute of knowing: God knows all things. Wisdom is the attribute of ordering: God orders all things according to the most perfect ends by the most perfect means. A being could, in principle, know all things without using that knowledge to accomplish the best possible purposes, though in the case of God, whose being is simple and whose attributes are inseparable, this is a merely theoretical distinction. In God, omniscience and wisdom are co-eternal and co-expressive dimensions of the single, unified divine mind: He knows all things, and in knowing all things, He orders all things with an infinite perfection of design, intention, and providential governance.

The wisdom of God is distinguished from creaturely wisdom in several crucial respects. First, creaturely wisdom is always partial: the wisest human being knows only a fraction of the relevant facts and can only approximately anticipate the consequences of a given course of action. Divine wisdom operates on the basis of perfect and exhaustive knowledge; the omniscience of the previous sections is the epistemological foundation of the wisdom of this section. Second, creaturely wisdom is always fallible: even with the best available information, the wisest creature can make mistakes, misjudge consequences, or fail to foresee complicating factors. Divine wisdom is infallible: God's determination of ends and means cannot be mistaken, cannot err, and cannot be improved upon by any superior wisdom. Third, creaturely wisdom is always limited in its scope of influence: even the wisest human governance extends only so far, constrained by forces beyond its control. Divine wisdom is sovereign in its scope: God not only knows the most perfect end and the most perfect means to that end, but He governs all things according to that wisdom with the sovereign power that guarantees the end He has ordained.

The primary biblical declaration of divine wisdom as it operates in creation and redemption is found in the prologue of Proverbs, where Wisdom is personified as the companion of God in the work of creation (Proverbs 8:22–31), and in the New Testament identification of the Lord Jesus Christ as “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24, NASB 1995). Paul’s declaration that Christ is “the wisdom of God” is not merely a metaphor; it is the Christological revelation that the eternal wisdom by which God orders all things has become incarnate in the Person of His Son, who is Himself “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3, NASB 1995).

Romans 11:33 is the apex of the New Testament’s celebration of divine wisdom: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” The Greek words are carefully chosen: *anek’ereunētos* (unsearchable, impossible to track down by investigation) and *anexich’iastos* (unfathomable, impossible to trace out by following the track). The wisdom by which God governs all things cannot be fully investigated from within the created order, because the ends it serves and the means it employs operate at a level of comprehensive sovereign purpose that exceeds the full grasp of any creaturely mind. Paul has just traced, through eleven chapters, the most magnificent display of God’s redemptive wisdom in Scripture, the history of Israel, the Gentile mission, the mystery of the remnant, the grafting in and the breaking off, the hardening and the salvation, and even after all of that, he stands at the edge of the wisdom and cries: unsearchable. Unfathomable. The depth of the riches.

VI. Omniscience, Wisdom, and the Providence of God: Every Detail Governed

The omniscience and wisdom of God are not merely attributes to be contemplated in the abstract; they are the cognitive and purposive foundation of the entire doctrine of divine providence, the doctrine that God governs all things, sustaining and directing every detail of the created order according to His sovereign purpose. The connection between omniscience, wisdom, and providence is logical and necessary: because God knows all things, He is never surprised by any event or any consequence; because He is wise, He has ordained all things to serve the most perfect ends; and because He is omnipotent, His ordained purposes are accomplished without fail.

Isaiah 46:10–11 draws the connection explicitly: God declares the end from the beginning and accomplishes all His good pleasure, calling the bird of prey from the east (Cyrus the Persian, who is named explicitly in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 before he appeared on the historical scene) as the instrument of His purpose centuries before Cyrus was born. The prophecy is the display of both attributes simultaneously: the omniscience that knows the future in exhaustive detail, and the wisdom that has designed a redemptive purpose that encompasses even the actions of a pagan king to accomplish the restoration of Israel. This is the wisdom that Paul contemplates in Romans 9–11 as he traces the mystery of Israel’s partial hardening and the Gentile mission: “He has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all” (Romans 11:32, NASB 1995). Only infinite wisdom could govern the whole of human

sinfulness toward the display of infinite mercy. Only omniscience could know every thread of that tapestry before a single thread was woven.

The practical implication for the believer's experience of providence is immense. Nothing that happens in your life, no event, no circumstance, no suffering, no loss, no apparent accident, no seemingly random convergence of circumstances, is outside the scope of the omniscient and wise governance of God. He knew it before it happened. He designed it as part of the most perfect possible ordering of all things toward the end He has appointed. And that end, for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, is not merely a tolerable outcome but "good" in the deepest and most comprehensive sense, conformity to the image of His Son (Romans 8:28–29), which is itself the deepest possible good for creatures made in the image of God.

VII. The Pastoral Significance: Nothing Surprises God, Nothing Escapes His Notice, Nothing Lies Beyond His Wise Governance

We close Lesson 13, and with it, Unit 4 on the incommunicable attributes, with the pastoral significance of omniscience and wisdom, which our outline identifies in three complementary affirmations: nothing surprises God, nothing escapes His notice, and nothing in your life is outside His wise and loving governance. Each of these affirmations is a direct pastoral application of the theological content we have been exploring, and each addresses a specific form of the anxiety, fear, and despair that the fallen human condition generates.

A. Nothing Surprises God

The omniscience of God means that every event in the history of the universe, including every event in the history of your life, was known to Him from before the foundation of the world, in the full depth of its detail, its consequence, and its significance. The diagnosis that shattered your world did not shatter His. The betrayal that blindsided you did not blindside Him. The loss that seemed to come from nowhere was fully encompassed within the scope of His eternal and exhaustive knowledge before the first cell of your body was formed. He was not surprised. He is never surprised.

This is not a cold comfort, as if the knowledge of God were merely a sophisticated form of determinism that renders suffering meaningless because it was anticipated. It is the warmest possible comfort, because the God who knew and knows is the God who also loves, the God who, knowing what you would face, placed you in the care of His Son, sealed you with His Spirit, and promised that nothing, not even the things that feel most like catastrophe, would be able to separate you from His love (Romans 8:38–39). The unsurprising God is the God who loved you before you were born and who loves you still in the midst of everything that was always within His eternal knowledge.

B. Nothing Escapes His Notice

The penetrating quality of divine omniscience, the truth that all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of the One with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13), means that every dimension of your experience, including those dimensions that no other human being has ever seen or can ever fully see, is fully known to God. The depth of your grief that

you have never been able to put into words. The prayer you prayed in the dark that no one heard. The suffering that has been too private, too complex, or too unspeakable to share with another soul. The fear that has kept you awake at 3 a.m. for the thousandth time. None of it has escaped His notice.

Psalm 56:8 captures this truth with an image of breathtaking pastoral tenderness: “You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?” (NASB 1995). Every tear. Every wandering. Every moment of grief and displacement and lostness. God has not merely been aware of it in a general sense; He has taken account of it, kept a record of it, preserved it as significant in the ledger of His omniscient care. Nothing you have suffered has been lost on God. Nothing you have experienced has been beneath His notice. Nothing you have endured has been so small or so private or so inexpressible that the omniscient God did not know it in its fullness.

C. Nothing Lies Beyond His Wise Governance

The wisdom of God means that every detail of your life, including the details that seem most random, most senseless, most cruel, or most contrary to any recognizable good, is being ordered by an infinitely wise God toward an end that is not merely tolerable but genuinely, perfectly, and ultimately good. This is the audacious claim of Romans 8:28: “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (NASB 1995). Not most things. Not the pleasant things and the spiritually instructive things, but all things. The betrayal. The illness. The financial ruin. The broken relationship. The unanswered prayer. The dream that died. All things, ordered by infinite wisdom toward an end that is “good” in the most ultimate and most permanent sense possible: conformity to the image of God’s Son (Romans 8:29).

This is the pastoral fruit of all that we have studied in Unit 4 on the incommunicable attributes. The aseity of God means His faithfulness does not depend on our performance. The immutability of God means His promises do not expire. The eternity and infinity of God mean that His purposes are not bounded by the temporal and spatial limitations that constrain our perspective. The omnipresence of God means He is never absent from the situation in which He is at work. And the omniscience and wisdom of God mean that He not only knows every detail of every situation but orders every detail toward the most perfect possible end. These are not independent doctrines; they are the interlocking facets of the one infinite God who holds all things in the palm of His sovereign, omniscient, all-wise hand.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

Psalm 147:5

“Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.”

Isaiah 46:9–10

“Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”

Romans 11:33–34

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?”

Hebrews 4:13

“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Omniscience	The divine attribute affirming that God knows all things, past, present, and future; actual and possible; great and small; public and private, exhaustively, immediately, and eternally. His knowledge is not acquired, sequential, or dependent on any external source. Declared in Psalm 147:5 (understanding without number), Hebrews 4:13 (all things open and laid bare), and Isaiah 40:13–14 (no counselor has informed Him).
Natural Knowledge	God’s knowledge of all necessary truths and all logical possibilities, everything that could possibly exist or occur, given His own nature and the nature of logical possibility. Not dependent on any decision God makes about what to create; it is prior to any divine creative decree. The foundation of all other divine knowledge.
Free Knowledge	God’s knowledge of the actual world He has chosen to create, all events that will actually occur, all creatures that will actually exist, all choices that will actually be made, given His sovereign creative decree. In the Reformed account, free knowledge is grounded in foreordination: God knows what will happen because He has ordained what will happen.
Middle Knowledge (Scientia Media)	The Molinist proposal for a third category of divine knowledge between natural knowledge and free knowledge: God’s knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, what every free creature would freely choose in every possible circumstance. Associated with

	Luis de Molina (16th c.) and revived by Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig. Criticized by Reformed theologians for the grounding objection: what makes counterfactuals of creaturely freedom true prior to God's creative decree?
Foreknowledge	God's eternal knowledge of future events. In the Arminian/simple foreknowledge view, God's knowledge of future free choices is like perfect prescient observation that does not causally determine the choice. In the Reformed view, foreknowledge is grounded in foreordination: God knows the future because He has sovereignly ordained it. The distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination is a distinction in our manner of speaking, not in two independent divine acts.
Compatibilism	The philosophical position that divine sovereignty (including foreordination) and genuine human freedom and responsibility are compatible. A free human choice, on this account, is one that flows from the agent's own desires and character without external compulsion, whether or not it is determined by prior causes. The Reformed tradition affirms compatibilism as the account most consistent with the Scripture's simultaneous affirmation of divine foreordination and human culpability.
Libertarian Freedom	The philosophical position that a genuinely free human choice is one that could have been otherwise in an absolute sense, not determined by any prior cause, including God's sovereign decree. Required by open theism and by most forms of Arminianism. Rejected by Reformed theology as incompatible with the biblical testimony to comprehensive divine foreordination and as an inadequate account of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
Wisdom of God	The divine attribute affirming that God not only knows all things (omniscience) but orders all things according to the most perfect ends by the most perfect means. Distinguished from omniscience by its purposive, ordering character: omniscience is knowing; wisdom is ordering. God's wisdom is infallible, sovereign in scope, and perfectly correlated with His omniscience. Celebrated in Romans 11:33–34 and identified personally in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 2:3).
Concurrence	The doctrine that God's sovereign governance operates through and alongside the genuine actions of creatures, rather than instead of them. God's sovereign purpose is the ultimate cause of every event; the creature's genuine choice is the proximate cause. Both are real; neither eliminates the other. The biblical example is Acts 4:27–28: those who crucified Christ acted freely and culpably while doing what God's hand and purpose predestined to occur.
Tetrachēlismenā (τετραχηλισμένα)	Greek word in Hebrews 4:13, translated "laid bare." Root may refer to bending back the neck of a sacrificial animal to expose the throat, or more broadly to anything stripped, bared, and utterly exposed.

Used to describe the condition of every creature before the omniscient God: nothing concealed, nothing hidden, all things naked and open to His sight. The most searching New Testament declaration of divine omniscience's penetrating reach into every dimension of creaturely existence.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that God's knowledge is not like a very well-informed observer's knowledge, comprehensive in scope but dependent on external sources, subject to growth, and potentially surprised by the unexpected. It is categorically different: inherent, immediate, simultaneous, and eternal. We must believe that His foreknowledge is grounded in His foreordination, and that this grounding is the foundation of all Christian confidence in providence. We must believe in the distinction between omniscience (knowing all things) and wisdom (ordering all things perfectly), and that the latter is the most immediately practical of the two: the wise God is not merely watching what happens; He is governing what happens, toward an end that is genuinely and ultimately good for those who love Him. And we must believe, with the full weight of both Testaments behind us, that the compatibility of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is not a philosophical problem to be solved but a biblical mystery to be received, a dual affirmation to be held with equal firmness and equal humility.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The omniscience of God should produce in us two complementary emotional responses, each genuine and each appropriate. The first is the sobriety of accountability: I live before the eyes of the One to whom all things are open and laid bare. The private life is not private from God. The secret thought, the hidden motive, the unspoken resentment, all of it is fully known. Let that truth produce not neurotic anxiety but the clean, quiet sobriety of one who lives with the awareness that there is an audience who sees everything and misses nothing. The second is the comfort of being fully known and fully loved: the God who knows everything about you, including everything you would be most ashamed for anyone to know, is the God who, in full knowledge of all of it, loved you, chose you, redeemed you, and sealed you with His Spirit. He was not surprised by any of it. And He loved you anyway. Let that truth produce the deepest possible rest.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

1. **Live in the accountability of omniscience.** The most practical implication of Hebrews 4:13 is the invitation to a life of radical integrity: since all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of the God with whom we have to do, let there be no gap between public profession and private practice. This is not the anxiety of performance under surveillance; it is the freedom of a life that has nothing to hide, because the one who knows everything has already been faced and has

already been found gracious. Live before the One who knows all things, and live consistently with that awareness.

2. **Rest your sense of being known in God's omniscience rather than in human understanding.** One of the deepest human longings is the longing to be fully known and fully loved. Every human relationship offers only a partial version of this, we are known imperfectly, loved conditionally, and often misunderstood. But the omniscient God knows you exhaustively, every dimension of your experience, every depth of your grief, every complexity of your struggle, and loves you with a love that is not conditioned on His approval of what He sees. Let the omniscience of God be the primary rest for the longing to be known.
3. **Ground your trust in providence in the omniscience and wisdom of God.** When circumstances seem random, senseless, or cruel, return to Isaiah 46:9–10 and Romans 8:28–29. The God who governs your life is not a limited being doing His best with imperfect information; He is the omniscient God who knew every detail of your circumstances before the world was made, and the infinitely wise God who has ordered every detail toward the most perfect possible end. Trust is not naivety; it is faith in the character of the One who knows all things and orders all things wisely.
4. **Use the wisdom of God as the ground of intellectual humility.** Romans 11:33–34 declares that God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways unfathomable. There are dimensions of God's providential wisdom that we cannot trace from within the created order, purposes that are too deep, too comprehensive, and too sovereign for our creaturely minds to fully grasp. Let this produce in us not frustration but humility: the humility of the creature who knows that the God who governs all things is wiser than the creature's best understanding of what wisdom requires. When you cannot understand, trust the wisdom of the One who knows all things and orders all things perfectly.
5. **Celebrate the wisdom and knowledge of God in your worship.** Paul's response to eleven chapters of sustained theological argument about omniscience and wisdom is not a further argument; it is a doxology: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Let this be the shape of your worship, not merely the acknowledgment of abstract theological attributes, but the eruption of wonder at the God who knows all things and orders all things wisely, and who has directed both His knowledge and His wisdom toward the salvation and the eternal good of those who love Him. Let the series verse of this entire study be not merely a theological slogan but the heartfelt cry of a soul that has genuinely glimpsed the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: You are fully known by God, not in outline, not approximately, but exhaustively, in the full depth of who you are, what you have done, and what you struggle with. And in full knowledge of all of it, He has called you, redeemed you, and promised never to forsake you. The omniscience of God is the ground of your security:

He was not surprised by your sin, and He is not surprised by your weakness. He knew, and He loved anyway.

For the one who is suffering inexplicably: The suffering that makes no sense to you, the loss that seems random, the illness that seems cruel, the circumstances that seem utterly contrary to any intelligible good, is not random from the perspective of the omniscient and wise God who governs your life. He knew this would happen. He has not been caught off guard. And He has been ordering it, with infinite wisdom, toward an end that will one day be seen to be good in the most ultimate and most permanent sense. You may not be able to trace the wisdom from within the suffering. But you can trust the wisdom of the One who has already traced it.

For the one wrestling with divine sovereignty and human freedom: The theological tension between God's foreordination and your genuine responsibility is real, and it is not easily resolved by any philosophical formula. But it is a tension that the Scripture holds with serene confidence, and you can too. God has ordained all things, and you are genuinely responsible for your choices. Both are true. Hold them together, and hold them humbly, and let the mystery drive you not to confusion but to the worship that Paul's own wrestling with this question produced: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

For the pastor and teacher: As we close Unit 4 on the incommunicable attributes, reflect on the arc of what we have studied: aseity, immutability, eternity, infinity, omnipresence, and now omniscience and wisdom. Each attribute has been a further window into the incomprehensible greatness of the God we serve. Preach these doctrines. Teach them with theological precision and pastoral warmth. Let the people of God discover, through the patient study of who God is, that the God who knows all things and orders all things wisely is the same God who has promised to work all things together for their good. And let every sermon on these attributes end where Paul's great theological argument ends: not with a proposition, but with a doxology.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Have you ever been in a situation where someone knew you more fully than you expected, where a friend, a counselor, or a loved one perceived something about you that you had not disclosed? How did that experience of being known feel? How does that partial human experience of being known point toward, and yet fall infinitely short of, the experience of being fully known by the omniscient God?

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read Psalm 147:1–5. What is the context of verse 5's declaration that God's understanding is infinite? How do the surrounding verses about God's care for the vulnerable (vv. 2–3) and His governance of creation (vv. 4–5) together declare the scope and the compassion of divine omniscience? What is the Hebrew phrase

translated “infinite” (‘ein mispar), and what does its literal meaning contribute to the doctrine?

3. Read Hebrews 4:12–13. What is the context of verse 13’s declaration of omniscience, specifically, what does verse 12 say about the Word of God, and how does verse 13 extend the image? What does the Greek *tetrachēlismenā* (laid bare, open) contribute to the image of divine omniscience? What is the significance of the phrase “with whom we have to do” (or “to whom we must give account”)?

4. Read Isaiah 46:8–11. What challenge does God issue in verses 8–9? What does God declare about His knowledge of the future in verse 10? What specific example does He give in verse 11, and what is the historical referent (hint: see Isaiah 44:28)? How does this passage ground divine foreknowledge in divine foreordination?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. Explain the three dimensions of divine omniscience discussed in the lesson: comprehensive scope (all things past, present, and future), extension to possibles (all counterfactuals), and penetrating reach (Hebrews 4:13). How do these three together distinguish divine omniscience from any creaturely analogue?

6. Compare and contrast the three views on God’s knowledge of future free choices: simple foreknowledge, middle knowledge (Molinism), and the Reformed account of foreknowledge grounded in foreordination. What is the grounding objection against Molinism? Why does the Reformed account provide the most secure foundation for divine omniscience of the future?

7. What is the difference between omniscience and wisdom? Why is this distinction not merely academic but pastorally important? How does Colossians 2:3 (“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ”) connect the wisdom of God to the Person of Christ?

8. Explain compatibilism as the Reformed account of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. How does Acts 4:27–28 illustrate the compatibility of divine foreordination and genuine human culpability? Why does the Reformed tradition regard this as a mystery to be received rather than a problem to be solved?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. The doctrine of omniscience produces two complementary emotional responses: the sobriety of accountability and the comfort of being fully known and fully loved. Which of these two responses do you find most natural, and which do you tend to underemphasize? What would it look like to hold both together in a more integrated way?

10. Romans 8:28–29 grounds the claim that God works all things together for good in the twin attributes of omniscience (He knows all the details) and wisdom (He orders all the details toward the most perfect end). Think of the most painful or confusing circumstance you are currently facing. How does the specific affirmation that an omniscient and infinitely wise God is governing that circumstance change the way you relate to it?

11. Paul's response to eleven chapters of sustained theological argument about God's sovereignty, foreknowledge, and wisdom is a doxology, not a conclusion (Romans 11:33–36). What does this tell us about the proper relationship between rigorous theological study and doxological worship? How might this shape the way you approach the discipline of theological study in general?

12. As we close Unit 4 on the incommunicable attributes of God, aseity, immutability, eternity, infinity, omnipresence, omniscience, and wisdom, reflect on the arc of these five lessons as a whole. Which attribute has most transformed your understanding of God? Which has most directly addressed a pastoral need in your own life? And how does the cumulative weight of all five together shape the way you think about the God who is not merely great in isolated dimensions but comprehensively, incomprehensibly, and gloriously great in the fullness of His entire being?

Prayer Focus

Open your prayer with the doxology of our series verse, and let it be, for the first time in this series, not merely a theological statement but a genuine eruption of worship drawn from everything we have studied: Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Let the wonder of Romans 11:33–34 be not merely recited but felt, the wonder of a soul that has, through the five lessons of Unit 4, been brought to the edge of the divine being and found that there is no edge, no bottom, no measure, no end.

Then pray through the pastoral applications of omniscience and wisdom. Bring before the omniscient God the situations in your life that He already knows in full detail, the suffering that seems senseless, the circumstance that seems random, the fear that seems unmanageable, and acknowledge before Him: You know this. You have always known this. You are not surprised. And ask the all-wise God to do what only He can do: order what you cannot understand toward an end you cannot yet see, according to the wisdom that is too deep for any creaturely mind to fully trace.

Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the cumulative gift of Unit 4. Thank God for the aseity that grounds your assurance, the immutability that makes His promises unbreakable, the eternity and infinity that make His purposes larger and more durable than any temporal circumstance, the omnipresence that means He is never far from your greatest need, and the omniscience and wisdom that mean nothing in your life is outside the scope of His knowing and His governing. And close, as Paul closes, with the doxology that is the only adequate response to the God we have been studying: For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Dr. Joshua Nichols

josh@faithfultotheword.com | faithfultotheword.com