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*John Gill's*

**A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY**

**Book 1—Chapter 9**

**OF THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD**

Having considered such attributes of God, which belong to him as an active and operative Spirit; as the Life of God, and his Power, or Omnipotence; I proceed to consider such perfections, which may be ascribed to him as an intelligent Spirit; to which, rational spirits, endowed with understanding, will, and affections, bear some similarity. God is said to have a "mind" and "understanding", (Rom. 11:34; Isa. 40:28) to which may be referred, the attributes of "knowledge" and "wisdom", which go together, (Rom. 11:33. I shall begin with the first of these. And,

1. Prove that knowledge belongs to God, which is objected to, and called in question, by impious and atheistical persons, (Ps. 73:11) particularly with respect to human affairs; the grounds of which doubts about it, and objections to it, seem to arise, partly from the supposed distance of God in heaven, from men on earth, and partly from the thick and dark clouds which intervene between them, (Job 22:12-14) and which are easily answered by observing the omnipresence of God, or his presence in all places; and that the darkness hides not anything from his all-piercing, all-penetrating eye, the darkness and the light being alike to him (Ps. 139:7-12; Jer. 23:23, 24). Let it be further observed, that in all rational creatures there is knowledge; there is much in angels, and so there was in man, before the fall, both of natural, divine, and civil things; and since the fall there is a remainder of it, notwithstanding the loss sustained by it; and there is more, especially divine and spiritual knowledge, in regenerate men, who are renewed in knowledge. Now if there is knowledge in any of the creatures of God, then much more in God himself. Besides, all that knowledge that is in angels or men, comes from God; he is a "God of knowledge", or "knowledges", of all knowledge, (1 Sam. 2:3) the source and fountain of it, and therefore it must be in him in its perfection: knowledge of all things, natural, civil, and spiritual, is from him, is taught and given by him;

wherefore strong is the reasoning of the Psalmist, "He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?" (Ps. 94:10). His knowledge may be inferred from his will, and the actings of it; that he has a will is most certain, and works all things after the counsel of his will, which cannot be resisted, (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 9:19) and this can never be supposed to be without knowledge; it is generally said and believed of the will of man, that it is determined by the last act of the understanding; and it cannot be imagined that God wills anything ignorantly and rashly; he must know what he wills and nills, and to whom he wills anything, or refuses, (Rom. 9:15, 18) and it appears from all his works, from the works of creation, the heavens, earth, and sea, and all in them; which are ascribed to his wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, and could never be made without them, (Prov. 3:19, 20) the government of the world, and the judgment of the last day, suppose and require the same (Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 4:5). Without knowledge God would not be perfectly happy; the blessed one, and blessed for ever, as he is. It is knowledge that gives men the preference to the brute creation, and makes them happier than they, (Job 35:11) and the spiritual knowledge which good men have, gives them a superior excellency and felicity to bad men; and their happiness in a future state will lie, as in perfect holiness, so in perfect knowledge, or "to know", as they "are known", (1 Cor. 13:12). In short, without knowledge, God would be no other than the idols of the Gentiles, who have eyes, but see not; are the work of errors, and are falsehood and vanity; but the portion of Jacob is not like them (Jer. 10:14-16). I go on,

2. To show the extent of the knowledge of God; it reaches to all things, (John 21:17; 1 John 3:20) and is therefore with great propriety called "omniscience", and which the very heathens ascribe to God; and extend it to thoughts. Thales being asked, Whether a man doing ill, could lie hid to, or be concealed from God? answered, No, nor thinking neither. And Pindar says, If a man hopes that anything will be concealed from God, he is deceived.

2a. God knows himself, his nature and perfections: somewhat of this is known by creatures themselves, even by the very heathens, through the light of nature, and in the glass of the creatures, wherein God has showed it to them; even his invisible things, his eternal power and Godhead, (Rom. 1:19, 20) and which are more clearly displayed in Christ, and redemption by him; and more evidently seen by those who are favoured with a divine revelation: and if creatures know something of God, though imperfectly, then he must know himself in the most perfect manner: and rational creatures are endowed with knowledge of themselves, of their nature, and what belongs to them, as angels may reasonably be supposed to be; since even men, in their fallen and imperfect state, know something of themselves, of the constitution, temperament, and texture of their bodies, and of the powers and faculties of their souls; what is in them, in the inmost recesses of their minds, their thoughts, purposes, and intentions (1 Cor. 2:11). "Nosce teipsum, Know thyself", has been reckoned a wise maxim with philosophers, and the first step to wisdom and knowledge; and good men, illuminated by the Spirit of God, attain to the highest degree of it; and if creatures know themselves in any degree, infinitely much more must the Creator of all know himself. God knows himself in all his persons, and

each person fully knows one another; the Father knows the Son, begotten by him, and brought up with him; the Son knows the Father, in whose bosom he lay; and the Spirit knows the Father and Son, whose Spirit he is, and from whom he proceeds; and the Father and Son know the Spirit, who is sent by them as the Comforter (see Matthew 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:10,11). God knows the mode of each person's subsistence in the Deity, the paternity of the Father, the generation of the Son, and the spiration of the Holy Ghost; that these three are one, and one in three; three persons, but one God; which is a mystery incomprehensible by us; but inasmuch as God, who knows his own nature best, has so declared it to be, it becomes us to yield the obedience of faith unto it: he knows his own thoughts, which are the deep things of God, and as much above us as the heavens are above the earth, and as much out of our reach; but he knows them, (Jer. 29:11) that is, his decrees, purposes, and designs, as he needs must, since they are purposed in himself; he knows the things he has purposed, and the exact time of the accomplishment of them, which he has reserved in his own power (Eph. 1:11; Eccl. 3:1; Acts 1:7).

2b. God knows all his creatures, there is not any creature, not one excepted, "that is not manifest in his sight" (Heb 4:13). Known unto him are all his works; all that his hand has wrought, (Acts 15:18) when he had finished his works of creation, "he saw everything that he had made", looked over it and considered it, and pronounced it good, (Gen. 1:31) and his eye sees all things in their present state and condition; he knows all things "inanimate", all that is upon the earth, herbs, grass, trees, &c. and all in the bowels of it, metals and minerals; all that are in the heavens, not only the two great luminaries, the sun and moon, their nature, motion, rising, and setting, with everything belonging to them, but the stars innumerable; he "bringeth out their host by number", or them as a mighty army, and numerous; and yet, as numerous as they are, "he calleth them all by names"; such a distinct and particular knowledge has he of them, and that because he "hath created" them; and he upholds them in being, "by the greatness of his might", so that "not one faileth", (Isa. 40:26) he knows all the "irrational" creatures, the beasts of the field, "the cattle on a thousand hills"; "I know", says he, "all the fowls of the mountains", (Ps. 50:10, 11) as worthless a bird as the sparrow is, "not one of them falls" on the ground without the knowledge and will of God, (Matthew 10:29) he knows all the fishes of the sea, and provided one to swallow Jonah, when thrown into it; and which, at his order, cast him on dry land again (Jonah 1:17, 2:10). And if Adam had such knowledge of all creatures, as to give them proper and suitable names, (Gen. 2:19, 20) and Solomon, a fallen son of his, could "speak of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that springs out of the wall"; and "of beasts, fowl, creeping things, and fishes", (1 King 4:33) even of their nature, properties, use, and end; can it be thought incredible that God, the Creator of them, should have a distinct and perfect knowledge of all these? he knows all "rational" beings, as angels and men; the angels, though innumerable, being his creatures, standing before him, beholding his face, and sent forth by him as ministring spirits: the elect angels, whom he must know, since he has chosen them and put them under Christ, the head of all principality and power; and confirmed them, by his grace, in their happy state; and who stand on his righthand and left, hearkening to his voice, and ready to obey his

will; and are employed by him in providential affairs, and in things respecting the heirs of salvation. Yea, the apostate angels, devils, are known by him, and are laid up in chains of darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day, and are under the continual eye of God, and the restraints of his providence: the questions put to these by God, (Job 1:7) and by Christ, (Mark 5:9) do not imply any kind of ignorance of them; the one is put to lead on to a discourse concerning Job, and the other to show the greatness of the miracle wrought in casting them out. God knows all men, good and bad, all the sons of men, the inhabitants of the earth, wherever they are, in all places and in all ages, (Ps. 33:14; Prov. 15:3) he knows their hearts, for he has fashioned them alike, and is often said to be the searcher of them; he knows the thoughts of the heart; as his word, so is he a "discerner" of them, (Heb 4:12; Ps. 139:2) which is peculiar to God, and a strong proof of the Deity of Christ, the essential Word, (Matthew 9:4; John 2:24, 25; Heb 4:12, 13) the evil thoughts of men, which are many and vain, (Ps. 94:11) and the good thoughts of men, as he must, since they are of him, and not of themselves; and he takes such notice of them, as to write a book of remembrance of them, (2 Cor. 3:5; Mal. 3:16) he knows the imaginations of the thoughts of the heart, the first motions to thought, whether good or bad, (Gen. 6:5; 1 Chron. 28:9) he knows all the words of men, there is not one upon their tongues, or uttered by them, but he knows it altogether, (Ps. 139:4) the words of wicked men, even every idle word, which must be accounted for in the day of judgment; and much more their blasphemies, oaths, and curses; and all their hard speeches spoken against Christ and his people (Matthew 12:36; Jude 1:15). And the words of good men, expressed in prayer and thanksgiving, and in spiritual conversation with one another (Mal. 3:16). And all the works and ways of men, (Job 34:21) their civil ones, their downsitting and uprising, going forth and coming in, (Ps. 139:2, 3, 121:3, 8) and all their sinful ways and works, which will all be brought into judgment, and for which an account must be given at the bar of God, (Eccl. 12:14; 2 Cor. 5:10) as well as all the good works of God's people, who knows from what principles they spring, in what manner they are done, and with what views, and for what ends (Rev. 2:2, 19).

2c. God knows all things whatever, as well as himself and the creatures: he knows all things possible to be done, though they are not, nor never will be done; such as have been observed under the preceding attribute; and this knowledge is what is called by the schoolmen, "Knowledge of simple intelligence" of things that are not actually done. He knows what "might" be, and in course, "would" be, should he not prevent them by the interposition of his power and providence, and which he determines to do: so he knew the wickedness and treachery of the men of Keilah to David, and that if he stayed there, they would deliver him up into the hands of Saul, and therefore gave him notice of it, that he might make his escape from them, and so prevent their giving him up, according to his determinate will (1 Sam. 23:11, 12). God knows the wickedness of some mens' hearts, that they would be guilty of the most shocking crimes, and that without number, if suffered to live, and therefore he takes them away by death; and that such is the temper of some, that if they had a large share of riches, they would be so haughty and overbearing, there would be no living by them; and that even some good men, if they had them, would be tempted to

abuse them, to their own hurt, and therefore he gives them poverty. Moreover, God knows all things that have been, are, or shall be; and which the schools call, "knowledge of vision"; an intuitive view of all actual things; things past, present, and to come; so called, not with respect to God, with whom nothing is past nor future, but all present; but with respect to us, and our measures of time. He knows all former things, from the beginning of the world; and which is a proof of Deity, and such a proof that the idols of the Gentiles cannot give, nor any for them, (Isa. 41:22, 43:9) all past transactions at the creation, the fall of Adam, and what followed on that; the original of nations, and their settlement in the world; with various other occurrences to be met with only in the Bible, inspired by God; which, as it is the most ancient, so the truest and best history in the world: nothing that has been can escape the knowledge of God, nor slip out of his mind and memory; oblivion cannot be ascribed to him; could he forget past facts, or they be lost to him, how could everything, open or secret, be brought into account, at the day of judgment, as it will? (Eccl. 12:14). Forgetting the sins of his people, and remembering them no more, are attributed to him after the manner of men; who, when they forgive one another, do, or should, forget offences. God sees and knows all things present; all are naked and open to him, he sees all in one view; all that is done everywhere; as he must, since he is present in all places; and all live, and move, and have their being in him. He knows all things future, all that will be, because he has determined they shall be; it is his will that gives futurity to them, and therefore he must certainly know what he wills shall be: and this is another proof of Deity wanting in heathen idols (Isa. 41:22, 23, 44:7, 46:10). And this is what is called:

"Prescience" or "Foreknowledge"; and of which Tertullian, many hundreds of years ago, observed, that there were as many witnesses of it as there are prophets; and I may add, as there are prophecies; for all prophecy is founded on God's foreknowledge and predetermination of things; and of this there are numerous instances; as of the Israelites being in a strange land four hundred years, and then coming out with great substance, (Gen. 15:13, 14) of their seventy years captivity in Babylon, and deliverance from thence at the end of that time, (Jer. 29:10) with many other things relating to that people, and other nations; the prophecies of Daniel, concerning the four monarchies; the predictions of the Old Testament, concerning the incarnation of Christ, his sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, and session at God's right hand. And what is the book of the Revelation but a prophecy, and so a proof of God's foreknowledge of future events, which should be in the church and world, from the times of Christ to the end of the world? and this prescience, or foreknowledge of God, is not only of the effects of necessary causes, which necessarily will be, unless prevented by something extraordinary; and of which men themselves may have knowledge; as that things ponderous will fall downwards, and light things move upwards; and that fire put to combustible matter will burn; but of things contingent, which, as to their nature, may or may not be, and which even depend upon the wills of men; and which, with respect to second causes, are hap and chance. Indeed, with respect to God, there is nothing casual or contingent; nothing comes to pass but what is decreed by him, what he has determined either to do himself, or by others, or suffer to be done, (Lam. 3:37, 38)

that which is chance to others is none to him; what more a chance matter than a lot? yet though that is cast into the lap, and it is casual to men, how it will turn up, "the whole disposing of it is of the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). What more contingent than the imaginations, thoughts, and designs of men, what they will be? and yet these are foreknown before conceived in the mind, (Deut. 31:21; Ps. 139:2) or than the voluntary actions of men, yet these are foreknown and foretold by the Lord, long before they are done; as the names of persons given them, and what should be done by them; as of Josiah, that he should offer the priests, and burn the bones of men on the altar at Bethel, (see 1 King 13:2; 2 King 23:15, 16) and of Cyrus, that he should give orders for the building of the temple, and city of Jerusalem; and let the captive Jews go free without price, (Isa. 44:28, 45:13; Ezra 1:1-3) all which were predicted of these persons by name, some hundreds of years before they were born: how all this is reconcileable with the liberty of man's will, is a difficulty; and therefore objected to the certain foreknowledge and decree of God; but whether this difficulty can be removed, or no, the thing is not less certain: let it be observed, that God's decrees do not at all infringe the liberty of the will, nor do they put anything in it, nor lay any force upon it; they only imply a necessity of the event, but not of coercion, or force on the will; nor do men feel any such force upon them; they act as freely, and with the full consent of their will, whether good men or bad men, in what they do, as if there were no foreknowledge and determination of them by God; good men willingly do what they do, under the influence of grace, though foreordained to it by the Lord, (Eph. 2:10 Phil. 2:13 and so do wicked men; as Judas in betraying Christ, and the Jews in crucifying him; though both were "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23).

There is another sort of "prescience", or "foreknowledge", the Scriptures speak of; on which the election of persons to eternal life is founded, and according to which it is, (Rom. 8:30; 1 Peter 1:2) which is not a foreknowledge of faith, holiness, and good works, and perseverance therein, as causes of it; for these are effects and fruits of election, which flow from it; no bare foreknowledge of persons, but as joined with love and affection to the objects of it; and which is not general, but special; "The Lord knows them that are his", (2 Tim. 2:19) not in general, as he knows all men; but distinctly, and particularly, he loves them, approves of them, and delights in them, and takes a particular care of them; while of others he says, "I know you not", (Matthew 7:23) that is, as his beloved and chosen ones. But as this belongs to the doctrine of predestination, I shall defer it to its proper place.

3. Though enough has been said to prove the omniscience of God, by the enumeration of the above things; yet this may receive further proof from the several attributes of God: as from his "infinity"; God is infinite; he is unlimited and unbounded as to space, and so omnipresent; he is unbounded as to time, and so eternal; and he is unbounded as to power, and so omnipotent; and he is unbounded as to knowledge, and so omniscient; there is no searching, no coming to the end of his understanding. From his eternity; he is from everlasting to everlasting, and therefore must know everything that has been, is, or shall be. Men are but of yesterday, and therefore, comparatively, know nothing; "ars longa, vita brevis";

science is of a large extent, and man's life but short, and he can gain but little of it. Likewise from the "omnipresence" of God; he is every where, in heaven, earth, and hell; and therefore must know every creature, and everything that is done there, (Ps. 139:7-12) and it may be observed, that what is said there of this attribute, follows upon an account of the omniscience of God, and serves to confirm it: it may be argued from the "perfection" of God; if any thing was wanting in his knowledge, neither that, nor he himself, would be perfect. If the circuit of the sun is from one end of the heaven to the other, and nothing is hid on earth from its light and heat; and hence the heathens represent it as seeing all things; then much more may be said of God, who is a sun, that "he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven" (see Ps. 19:6; Job 28:24). From each of the works of God his omniscience may be inferred; he has made all things, and therefore must perfectly know them; every artificer knows his own work, its nature, composition, parts, use, and end. God upholds all things, and is present with them, and therefore must have knowledge of them; he governs the world, orders, directs, and disposes of all things in it; provides for all his creatures; feeds them, and gives them their portion of meat in due season; and therefore must know them all: all the deeds of men, good and evil, public and private, will be all brought into judgment by him; which to do, requires omniscience (see Eccl. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 2:23).

4. The manner in which God knows all things, is incomprehensible by us; we can say but little of it, "such knowledge is too wonderful for us", (Ps. 139:6) we can better say in what manner he does not know, than in what he does: he does not know things by revelation, by instruction, and communication from another; or any way by which men come at the knowledge of things from others; for "shall any teach God knowledge?" or "who has taught him?" (Job 21:22; Isa. 40:13, 14) all things were known to God from eternity, when there were none in being to inform him of anything: besides, to suppose this, is not only contrary to his eternity but to his independency; for this would make him beholden to, and dependent on another, for his knowledge; whereas "all things are of him, for him, and through him". Nor is his knowledge attained by reasoning, discoursing, and inferring one thing from another, as man's is; who not only apprehends simple ideas, but joins and compounds them, and infers other things from them; but then this implies some degree of prior ignorance; or at best, imperfect knowledge, till the premises are clear, and the conclusion formed; which is not to be said of God: and this method of knowledge would be contrary to the simplicity of his nature, which admits of no composition, as well as to his perfection: nor does he know things by succession, one after another; for then it could not be said, that "all things are naked and open to him"; only some at one time, and some at another; which would also argue ignorance of some things, in one instant and another; and imperfection of knowledge; and would be contrary to his immutability, since every accession of knowledge would make an alteration in him; whereas with him "there is no variableness"; he sees and knows all things at once and, together, in one eternal view. In a word, he knows all things in himself, in his own essence and nature; he knows all things possible in his power, and all that he wills to do in his will, and all creatures in himself, as the first cause of them; in whose vast and eternal mind are

**all the original ideas of them; so that the knowledge of God is essential to him, it is his nature and essence, and therefore is incommunicable to a creature, and even to the human nature of Christ; which, though united to a divine person that is omniscient, yet does not thereby become omniscient; and though the human soul of Christ may know more than the soul of any man, yet not everything; (see Mark 13:32). The knowledge of God is also infinite, (Ps. 147:5) he knows himself, that is infinite; which he could not, unless his knowledge was infinite; for it is impossible, as a Jewish writer observes, that he should know what is perfectly infinite, if his knowledge was not perfectly infinite; for what is finite, can never comprehend that which is infinite; and he knows all things "ad infinitum"; there is no searching of his knowledge; it is perfect, and nothing can be added to it, (Job 36:4 and it is not conjectural, but certain, depending on his will; he knew from all eternity, most certainly, that all things would be, that are, because he determined they should be; and his will cannot be frustrated, nor his power resisted (Job 42:2).**