

God, Omnipotent and Omniscient, Gives Choice

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—God is often described as "omnipotent" and "omniscient." What do these two terms mean, and is it possible for God to be both?

First, some definitions.

In their simplest forms omnipotent means "all-powerful" and omniscient means "all-knowing." To most of us who are believers, these two terms can rightfully be applied to God.

Why would anyone worship a god who isn't all-powerful?

If your god is not all-powerful, why not find the God who is and worship Him?

And, if your God is all-powerful, wouldn't He have the power to know everything?

It might be surprising, but, biblically speaking, there are some things that an all-powerful God can't do.

- God can't lie.

Hebrews 6:18— "It is impossible for God to lie . . ."

- God cannot be tempted.

James 1:13—"God cannot be tempted by evil."

- God cannot deny Himself.

2 Timothy 2:13—"He cannot deny himself."

In his book *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, Wayne Grudem says, "God cannot will or do anything that will deny his character. It is not absolutely everything that God is able to do, but everything that is consistent with his character."

All-powerful, yes. But God has self-imposed limits on his power.

There are certain things that He won't do because they are the opposite of who He is, and He simply will not act that way.

So what about the all-knowing attribute?

Does God see the entire sweep of history from beginning to end, knowing about everything that is now and everything that will ever happen, including those people, both born and unborn, who will and will not have salvation?

If God is all-powerful, He certainly has the authority and power to create a universe with the following characteristics.

- A universe where nothing is left to chance.
- A universe where nothing is out of His complete control.
- A universe where the unfolding of history is predetermined as sure as every cause leads to a predetermined effect.

But, if God is all-powerful, He could also choose to create a world that has the freedom to make its own choices independently of God's will.

- He could create a world where He chooses not to know what choices people will make.
- He could create a world where the beings He creates have the freedom to make their own choices.
- More than that, he could create a universe with a specific, predetermined end in mind (let's call it the Kingdom of God), but an end or destiny where not every turn in the road is planned for in advance.
- Put differently, an all-powerful God could create a universe and a plan that is sure, but at the same time not determine in advance whether you or me or anyone else will choose to accept that plan.

In fact there are hints of this throughout scripture.

When God tested Abraham, and Abraham showed his faithfulness to God through that test (Genesis 22), God sent this message: "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (verse 12).

"Now I know"?

Did not an all-knowing God know in advance what Abraham's actions would be?

When Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, God sets a choice before the nation. He lays before them two ways of life: the way of following God or the way of following the world around them.

Deuteronomy 30:15—"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil."

Just as in the garden, where the first man and the first woman had the choice of choosing the fruit that God had given them or the fruit of the one tree that was forbidden, Israel was given the freedom to make a choice.

Deuteronomy 30:19—"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."

"Choose"! It's all up to you!

God's Kingdom is sure. God has predetermined it. It's baked in the cake. Things will happen because God has already decided some things.

But He has not decided everything, and one of those things He has decided is how you and I will live our lives. That's up to us. We have the freedom to choose roads we take.

God is all powerful, and therefore He has the power to give up control and yield some to us. We get to decide how to exercise it.