

How are we to understand the knowledge of Jesus Christ while he was incarnate on the earth?

This question has been made more difficult, as some have not been careful to keep the two natures of Christ, Divine and Human, separated and the one person of Christ united. As a result, they have concluded that there is a difference in the omniscience of Christ and the omniscience of the Father, or that there is a change in the omniscience of Christ over time, or that when Christ speaks He ALWAYS speaks concerning both of His natures each time He speaks, in each and every regard.

Rather we should see Christ speaking and acting, at all times, in ways appropriate to either His Divine nature or His Human nature or both His Divine and Human Nature. We must discern from which of these natures He speaks or acts, based on the whole context and counsel of the OT and NT witness.

Below, please find the reference Scripture passages which many have cited in their consideration of this question and some sample comments from scholars as they have sought to make the sense of this.

Matthew 24:36-39 (New American Standard Bible (1995 Update))

³⁶ "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. ³⁷ "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸ "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Matthew 24:36-39 (King James Version)

³⁶ But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. ³⁷ But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ³⁸ For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, ³⁹ And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Mark 13:32 (New American Standard Bible (1995 Update))

³² "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

Mark 13:32 (King James Version)

³² But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

SPROUL

nor the Son. Jesus is conscious of His unique relationship to the Father as the eternal Son, yet with respect to His true human nature there is a limitation of His knowledge. According to Jesus' humanity, what the Father has not revealed to Him about the future He does not know.

BEEKE

knoweth no man. God has kept the date of the day of the Lord secret, and anyone who claims to have calculated it is not following God's Word. ***neither the Son.*** Though **Christ knows all things in His infinite deity, His human mind was limited, being a created intelligence; as man,** He knew only what God progressively revealed to Him at various stages of His life (Luke 2:52).

MAC ARTHUR

no one knows. The time of Christ's return will not be revealed in advance to any man. At this time, it was known only to God the Father. ***angels.*** While all the angelic beings enjoy intimacy with God, hover around His throne to do His bidding (Isa 6:2–7), and continually behold Him (Mt 18:10), they have no knowledge of the time of Christ's return. ***nor the Son.*** When Jesus spoke these words to the disciples, even He had no knowledge of the date and time of His return. **Although Jesus was fully God (Jn 1:1, 14), when He became a man, He voluntarily restricted the use of certain divine attributes (Php 2:6–8). He did not manifest them unless directed by the Father (Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38).** He demonstrated His omniscience on several occasions (cf. Jn 2:25; 13:3), but **He voluntarily restricted that omniscience to only those things God wanted Him to know during the days of His humanity (Jn 15:15).** Such was the case regarding the knowledge of the date and time of His return. After He was resurrected, Jesus resumed His full divine knowledge (cf. Mt 28:18; Ac 1:7).

NET BIBLE

The phrase ***nor the Son*** has caused a great deal of theological debate because on the surface it appears to conflict with the concept of Jesus' deity. The straightforward meaning of the text is that the Son does not know the time of his return. If Jesus were divine, though, wouldn't he know this information? There are other passages which similarly indicate that Jesus did not know certain things. For example, Luke 2:52 indicates that Jesus grew in wisdom; this has to mean that Jesus did not know everything all the time but learned as he grew. So Mark 13:32 is not alone in implying that Jesus did not know certain things. **The best option for understanding Mark 13:32 and similar passages is to hold the two concepts in tension: The Son in his earthly life and ministry had limited knowledge of certain things, yet he was still deity.**

TYNDALE COMMENTARY

No one knows: this is a wise warning that, if we calculate to our own satisfaction the date in time upon which Christ will return, we shall certainly be mistaken. This should strike caution into the most daring modern exponent of prophecy. At a deeper level, **it teaches that there are certain things hidden even from the Son, in the omniscience of the Father.** Compare the statement of Jesus to James and John (10:40), that to sit on his right and left was not in his power to grant. This is the only place in Mark where Jesus refers to himself absolutely as 'the Son' (Anderson). It has been claimed by some that a familiar later title for Jesus is here being used by the evangelist: but such an 'absolute' usage is not impossible on the lips of Jesus himself in the light of the use of *my son* in the parable of the tenant farmers (12:6), clearly referring to Jesus.

MATTHEW HENRY

knoweth no man; it is a thing at a great distance; the exact time is **fixed in the counsel of God,** but is not revealed by any word of God, either to *men* on earth, or to *angels in heaven*; the angels shall have timely notice to prepare to attend in that day, and it shall be published, when it comes to the children of men, with sound of trumpet; but, at present, *men* and *angels* are kept in the dark concerning the precise time of it, that they may both attend to their proper services in the present day." But it follows, **neither the Son; but is there any thing which the Son is ignorant of? We read indeed of a book which was sealed, till the Lamb opened the seals; but did not he know what was in it, before the seals were opened? Was not he privy to the writing of it?**

There were those in the primitive times, who taught from this text, that **there were some things that Christ, as man, was ignorant of;** and from these were called *Agnoetæ*; they said, **“It was no more absurd to say so, than to say that his human soul suffered grief and fear;” and many of the orthodox fathers approved of this.** Some would evade it, by saying that Christ spoke this in a way of prudential economy, to divert the disciples from further enquiry: but to this one of the ancients answers, *It is not fit to speak too nicely in this matter—ou dei pany akribologeïn*, so Leontius in Dr. Hammond, **“It is certain (says Archbishop Tillotson) that Christ, as God, could not be ignorant of any thing; but the divine wisdom which dwelt in our Saviour, did communicate itself to his human soul, according to the divine pleasure, so that his human nature might sometimes not know some things;** therefore Christ is said to grow in wisdom (Luke ii. 52), which he could not be said to do, if the human nature of Christ did necessarily know all things by virtue of its union with the divinity.” Dr. Lightfoot explains it thus; Christ calls himself the Son, as Messiah. Now the Messiah, as such, was the father’s servant (Isa. xlii. 1), sent and deputed by him, and as such a one he refers himself often to his Father’s will and command, and owns he *did nothing of himself* (John v. 19); in like manner he might be said to *know nothing of himself*. The revelation of Jesus Christ was what *God gave unto him*, Rev. i. 1. He thinks, therefore, that we are to distinguish between those excellencies and perfections of his, which resulted from the personal union between the divine and human nature, and those which flowed from the anointing of the Spirit; from the former flowed the infinite dignity of his perfect freedom from all sin; but from the latter flowed his power of working miracles, and his foreknowledge of things to come. What therefore (saith he) was to be revealed by him to his church, he was pleased to take, not from the union of the human nature with the divine, but from the revelation of the Spirit, by which he yet knew not this, but **the Father only knows it; that is, God only, the Deity; for (as Archbishop Tillotson explains it) it is not used here personally, in distinction from the Son and the Holy Ghost, but as the Father is, Fons et Principium Deitatis—The Fountain of Deity.**

CALVIN

but of that day and hour. By this sentence, Christ intended to hold the minds of believers in suspense that they might not, by a false imagination, fix any time for the final redemption. We know how fickle our minds are, and how much we are tickled by a vain curiosity to know more than is proper. Christ likewise perceived that the disciples were pushing forward with excessive haste to enjoy a triumph. He therefore wishes the day of his coming to be the object of such expectation and desire, that none shall dare to inquire when it will happen. In short, he wishes his disciples so to walk in the light of faith, that while they are uncertain as to the time, they may patiently wait for the revelation of him. **We ought therefore to be on our guard, lest our anxiety about the time be carried farther than the Lord allows; for the chief part of our wisdom lies in confining ourselves soberly within the limits of God’s word.** That men may not feel uneasy at *not knowing that day*, Christ represents *angels* as their associates in this matter; for it would be a proof of excessive pride and wicked covetousness, to desire that we who creep on the earth should know more than is permitted to the *angels* in heaven.¹⁵¹

Mark adds, **nor the Son himself.** And surely that man must be singularly mad, who would hesitate to submit to the ignorance which even *the Son of God himself* did not hesitate to endure on our account. But many persons, thinking that this was unworthy of Christ, have endeavored to mitigate the harshness of this opinion by a contrivance of their own; and perhaps they were driven to employ a subterfuge by the malice of the Arians, who attempted to prove from it that Christ is not the true and only God. So then, according to those men, Christ did not know the last day, because he did not choose to reveal it to men. But since it is manifest that the same kind of ignorance is ascribed to Christ as is ascribed to *the angels*, we must endeavor to find some other meaning which is more suitable. Before stating it, however, I shall briefly dispose of the objections of those who think that it is an insult offered to the Son of God, if it be said that any kind of ignorance can properly apply to him.

As to the first objection, that nothing is unknown to God, the answer is easy. For we know that in Christ the two natures were united into one person in such a manner that each retained its own properties; and more especially the Divine nature was in a state of

repose, and did not at all exert itself,¹⁵² whenever it was necessary that the human nature should act separately, according to what was peculiar to itself, in discharging the office of Mediator.

There would be no impropriety, therefor in saying that Christ, who knew all things, (John 21:17) was ignorant of something in respect of his perception as a man; for otherwise he could not have been liable to grief and anxiety, and could not have been *like us*, (Hebrews 2:17.) Again, the objection urged by some—that ignorance cannot apply to Christ, because it is the punishment of sin—is beyond measure ridiculous. For, first, it is prodigious folly to assert that the ignorance which is ascribed to angels proceeds from sin; but they discover themselves to be equally foolish on another ground, by not perceiving that Christ clothed himself with our flesh, for the purpose of enduring the punishment due to our sins. **And if Christ, as man, did not know the last day, that does not any more derogate from his Divine nature than to have been mortal.**

I have no doubt that he refers to the office appointed to him by the Father as in a former instance, when he said that *it did not belong to him* to place this or that person *at his right or left hand*, (Matthew 20:23; Mark 5:40.) For (as I explained under that passage¹⁵³) he did not absolutely say that this was not in his power, but the meaning was, that he had not been sent by the Father with this commission, so long as he lived among mortals. So now I understand that, so far as he had come down to us to be Mediator, until he had fully discharged his office that information was not given to him which he received after his resurrection; for then he expressly declared that power over all things had been given to him, (Matthew 28:18.)

ALBERT BARNES

Neither the Son. This text has always presented serious difficulties. It has been asked, If Jesus had a Divine nature, how could he say he knew not the day and hour of a future event? In reply, it has been said that the passage was wanting, according to Ambrose, in some Greek manuscripts. But it is now found in all, and there can be little doubt that the passage is genuine. Others have said that the verb rendered “knoweth,” means sometimes to *make* known, or to reveal; and that the passage means, “That day and hour none makes known, neither the angels, nor the Son, but the Father.” It is true, the word has sometimes that meaning, as in 1 Cor. 2:2; but then it is natural to ask where has the *Father* made it known? In what place did he reveal it? After all, the passage has no more difficulty than that in Luke 2:52, where it is said that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature. **He had a human nature. He grew as a man in knowledge. As a man, his knowledge must be finite, for the faculties of the human soul are not infinite. As a man, he often spoke, reasoned, inquired, felt, feared, read, learned, ate, drank, and walked. Why are not all these, which imply that he was a man—that, as a man, he was not infinite—why are not these as difficult as the want of knowledge respecting the particular time of a future event; especially when that time must be made known by God, and when he chose that the man, Christ Jesus, should grow and think, and speak as a man?**