

## **WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT GOD?**

**Part five - The Attributes of God and their Application to Daily Living**

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### **THE JOY OF WORSHIPING AN INFINITELY WISE GOD - The Wisdom of God**

A central conviction of the Scriptures is that ***God is never other than wise in anything He does*** - **Psalm 104:24** - "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." The Psalmist takes note that everything God ***does*** - His "***works***" - are directed towards the ***wisest ends***. In other words, not only does God ***know*** everything (omniscience), but His knowledge is never ***wasted*** knowledge. Everything God does is ***going*** somewhere. God never ***spins His tires***. The goal of His knowledge and power - all of God's divine ***ability*** - is ***wisely*** used.

***J.I.Packer*** said it as well as anyone in his classic book, "***Knowing God***" - "***Wisdom is knowledge harnessed to the right end. It's the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal and the surest means of attaining it.***"

Because God has access to all information, all His judgements are made wisely. He never makes a mistake. He always moves everything toward the proper end. In short, He, and He alone, can “***work all things together for good***”(Romans 8:28).

Think about this for a minute. God is never ***wrong***. God is never ***confused***. He is never caught wondering ***how He will handle any situation***. He can ***never improve on any decision He has made***. He has never had to ***correct an error He has made - never***. He always does the right thing ***the very first time***.

True, there are those tricky passages where the Bible speaks of God ***repenting*** and ***changing His mind***. The people of Nineveh turn from their sins and God changes His mind about His coming judgement. But while God, in very human language, reveals the anguish of His heart, this isn't so much a changing of ***God's plan*** (He ***told*** the people they needed to repent to avoid His judgment) but rather it's the ***people realigning themselves with what God intended all along***. It's a bit like walking ***into*** the wind and walking ***with*** the wind. You experience the wind in different ways, but it isn't really the wind that changed.

Sometimes we get so familiar with the ***language*** of certain truths we get used to speaking the ***words*** without knowing what those words actually ***contain***. When considering the wisdom of God here are the basics to keep in mind. I have three points. We'll study one tonight and two next week:

1) **GOD WORKS ALL THINGS WITH ETERNAL ENDS IN MIND**

I will always be stubbing my toe on the wisdom of God if I'm measuring it by my own assessment of the appropriateness and pleasantness of my circumstances. God's goal for my life never **has** been and never **will** be its pleasantness.

In fact, we will come huge strides in understanding the ways of God if we remember just **two features** of the motivation behind **everything** God does. **First**, He is looking for the development of **my Christ-likeness** and, **second, His eternal glory**.

This means if my whole life is bent on the pursuit of **self-fulfillment** and **instant reward** God and I will constantly be on two different pages. And I can't win if I'm not on God's page. If I am going to see the wise hand of God on my life, I must be looking at it with **His goals and ends in view**.

So important is this truth, the Scriptures bulge with examples of learning to submit to the ultimate end of God's wise agenda for our circumstances:

- a) **Job 23:8-10** - “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; [9] on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. [10] But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.”

Now, from a certain perspective, there is nothing good happening to Job at all. Certainly, everything **looks** confused and chaotic. Measuring from the outward circumstances of Job’s life, either God doesn't exist, or He doesn't care, or He's unable to do anything about Job’s problems.

Yet we know from the solid revelation of Scripture that all of those conclusions are dead wrong. Today, solid gold Job has a clear, complete picture. Back then, only God did. Job had to trust in God's wisdom. And as pious and poetic as those words sound - “***Just trust in Almighty God’s wisdom!***” - the **reason** Job was able to trust was he ***understood the goals of God’s wisdom - “...when he has tried me I shall come out as gold...”(10).*** God’s wisdom is directing everything to **shape** Job, not **please** Job.

- b) **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, [4] who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”**

Behold the wisdom of God. He uses the difficult situations of life to prepare us for ministry we haven't any inkling about yet. In His wisdom He knows the end from the beginning. He's getting Paul ready for ministry opportunities Paul couldn't see yet. Paul was patient and prayerful enough to see the wisdom of God. God was putting Paul in some situations where Paul would have to really rely on the Lord for hope and comfort.

But *why?* What was God *up to* in His wisdom? Paul says it was so he, Paul, would be able to comfort others who would face the same kinds of situations. In other words, God was preparing Paul for helping hurting people on a deeper level than Paul could give if he had only *advice* to offer them, rather than the kind of genuine compassion that is borne from sharing the same struggles.

Pause over this truth for just a minute. I think this idea of suffering in the wise plan of God so we can minister more effectively the love of Jesus to others in their need and pain may be the best explanation for one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament - **Colossians 1:24** - **“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church....”**

Certainly we can't make up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions in the sense of helping ***redeem*** sinners. But we ***can***, by trusting in the wisdom of Father God, know that everything He brings us through is done with the wise agenda of ministering the ***kind*** of love Jesus demonstrated when He suffered for us. We love and care for people on a ***deeper level*** when we can ***empathize fully*** with their suffering rather than merely spin out tidy advice for their situations. In His infinite wisdom God uses our trials to ***give our hearts over to those who need our help.***

- c) **2 Corinthians 12:7-9** - "So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. [8] Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. [9] But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Buried in the theology of these verses is the subject of *unanswered prayer* - or at the very least, prayers that don't produce the answer we *desired*. Here is the great apostle Paul, a man who had been caught up in the spirit into heaven itself, who had raised the dead and cast out demons - here is *this* apostle, bumbling along like the rest of us, not knowing why God won't listen to him.

If you've prayed over and over again for healing or help in some area, *and the Lord hasn't shown you any reason to stop asking*, then keep asking, seeking, knocking. But at some point in time, at least stop and seek His face on one very important issue: *"Lord, what can I learn from this? Do you have some higher purpose? My love for you doesn't depend on getting you to perform a miracle. Teach me Your way."*

That last phrase is so important whenever we're studying the **wisdom** of God - "**Teach me Your way.**" Every Christian needs to learn deeply that God wants to do more than constantly just **tell us what to do**. He wants us to **learn His way**. Learning His **way** is just another way of saying "**learning His wisdom**." Learning His **way** is learning the **way He does things**. It's learning His goals and striving for His agenda. And it's learning to do this **by nature - without always having to be told**.

Do you want to constantly have to tell your children to brush their teeth? Even if they **obey** you, do you want to always have to **tell** them? No. What you **want** is for them to mature in knowing what is truly important **for themselves**. Paul said he actually had to **learn** from the Lord that God was more interested in Paul's **humility** than his **comfort**. This was learning **God's ways**. And Paul would not have **known** this had God immediately answered his prayer for physical relief.

Here again, trusting in God's wisdom has a **maturing** influence on our lives. This is the way it worked for Paul.

- d) **2 Corinthians 4:7-10** - “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. [8] We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

Again, we have to understand how the wisdom of God works or we're going to be confused. This relates to one of the most common mistakes Christian people make as they assess some form of service for the Lord.

We feel that our sense of *inadequacy* for some task means we can't possibly be *called* to it. We think the only criteria for spiritual usefulness comes from qualifying to be used by God. We feel that our *weaknesses* put us on the sidelines of what God has for us in this world.

But Paul unfolds another aspect of the wisdom of God in these verses. He describes his **condition** under the load of ministry in words that don't sparkle their way into many "**how to**" ministry best sellers - "**afflicted,**" "**perplexed,**" "**persecuted,**" and "**struck down**"(8-9). Like it or not, Paul says he goes through untold garbage - he feels crushed and overwhelmed all the time - and he's right **smack-dab in the middle of the will of God for his life!**

But God has a plan - a very **wise** plan - in this difficult situation. God's plan is to cause people to marvel at the glory of Christ in Paul's situation. God's plan is to make sure no one gets the impression Paul strides through life in his own strength. That would only bring glory to **Paul,** not **Christ.** And God loves this world too much to allow people to focus on Paul rather than Christ.

God's wise plan is to have lost people reached **evangelistically** and Christians **encouraged spiritually** through Paul's Christ glorifying life. Now, God in His wisdom has a totally different goal.

This is still God's method of operation in our lives today. In everything I do He wants it to be obvious that my strength is in the Lord so when I get through some difficult situation people will stand and say, "How wonderful of Christ to enable Pastor Don's life like that. That's the kind of God I want to serve! Because if God can do that through *him*, just imagine what He could do through *me*."