

God's Wisdom vs. Our Wisdom

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 June 2010

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] As you remember, we're in the second section of Knowing God. It's the meat of the book. It deals with all the different attributes of God.

! Today, we're taking a slight detour or maybe a pit stop. And we're going to look at the difference between God's wisdom and our wisdom.

God's wisdom and our wisdom. Last week, we looked at God's wisdom and Pastor John brought out four areas where God puts on display His wisdom.

Do you remember what those areas were? Creation. Right. Creation was the first one. God has created all things out of nothing, which, if you think about it, that takes not only power but wisdom to pull that off. He creates black holes and He creates little honeybees, which, according to all known rules of flight, shouldn't be able to fly. And yet, you see them out in your garden displaying the wisdom of God.

What other areas does God display His wisdom? Redemption. Right. God is just. We are sinners. And God justifies the wicked. He justifies those who are sinners.

[1:35] And that is a Gordian knot that no one could untie. But God, in His great wisdom, figured out how to magnify His justice and magnify His grace in one act.

And you can taste the same thing that Paul was relishing in when he said he did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Paul relished in God's wisdom. So at the cross, God justifies, satisfies justice, and justifies the ungodly all to the praise of His glorious grace.

And so, at the end of Romans, at the end of that section in Romans, Paul says, Oh, the depth of the wisdom and the knowledge of God.

There's two other areas. Do you remember what they were? Creation? Redemption? Providence. Providence. Yeah. If you've been here on Sunday evenings, Ecclesiastes has a lot to say about providence.

[2:50] And he's taken us into some very dark corners. But the whole time he believes and he's saying that God is in control in all these circumstances.

He's working all these things together for His glory and for our good. And so, He's making butterflies and earthquakes and your choices and my choices all interact in such a way that He has glory and that His people have the good in this situation.

There's the last one, last area where God shows His wisdom. Or big area. Do you remember? Remember? Sanctification.

God uses many different things to sanctify us. And He can use very difficult circumstances.

Crooked instruments to sanctify His saints.

He knows what trials to send to us. He knows what sermons to have us sit under. How many times have you experienced that? That was just what I needed. And it wasn't the pastors plotting, the pastors thinking.

[4:04] It was God working all things together for your good. He knows how to make people like His Son. Well, that's God's wisdom. That's God's wisdom.

And as you look at just what we've reviewed, you can tell that God's wisdom covers a much broader area than our wisdom ever could cover.

I mean, in our wisdom, we can't create, we can't save, we can't govern all creatures and all their actions. We can't sanctify other people. God's wisdom covers a much broader area.

That we can never do that. We can never act in the way that we can never have His wisdom because He's God and we're His creatures.

And His wisdom has depth that our wisdom will never be able to reach. Think of some of the things that just happen in our world. Think of terrorist attacks.

[5:05] Think of some of these earthquakes that we've experienced. Think of a baby born with a disability where they live a few hours and then they die. Things like that where we look at it and we scratch our head, we weep, and we wonder, how can these things be good in their own time?

How can God work all these things together for good? And yet, even in those circumstances where we have no idea how this could be wise, God's wisdom has not failed Him.

It is below. It's greater than ours. It reaches to greater depths than our wisdom ever could. And so there are purposes in God's heart that are beyond the wisdom of the wisest man.

And so God's wisdom is far broader than our wisdom. It's far deeper than our wisdom. And yet, in some way, God has told us to seek wisdom.

In some smaller, dependent way, we are to develop and pursue and exercise wisdom. So turn in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 1.

[6:23] And I have a question for you as we're turning there. What is the theme of Proverbs 1, chapter 1 through chapter 9?

And I'll give you a clue. It is not the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That is the beginning of wisdom. But I'm asking you, what is the theme of chapters 1 through 9?

Does anyone know? Wisdom for youth? That's a very good stab. That's really close.

Here's another clue. Look at chapter 4, verse 5. What are the first two words? Get wisdom. That is the theme of chapters 1 through 9 of Proverbs.

It's one long exhortation to do whatever you can to get wisdom. He gives all these reasons. Wisdom will be a garland to grace your head.

[7:26] Look at chapter 1, verse 18. He's speaking of sinners, of people who aren't wise. These men lie in wait for their own blood. They waylay only themselves.

Wisdom protects us from destroying ourselves and sin. Later on, wisdom will save you from the adulterous.

It will give you long life and prosperity. It will win you a good reputation. It will bring health to your body. Wisdom will take away your fear of sudden disaster.

So go back to Proverbs 4, 5. This is sort of where it reaches its highest point. Get wisdom.

Get understanding. Do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom and she will protect you. Love her and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme.

[8:23] Therefore, get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding. So God tells us in our limited human way to pursue wisdom.

It's more valuable than anything that we have. Well, it's not just Proverbs that teaches us to get wisdom. The New Testament is full of verses, full of commands to do the same.

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5. In verse 15.

Be very careful then how you live. Not as unwise, but as wise. Making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

God calls every Christian to be thoughtful, to be careful in the way that you live. We aren't...

[9:35] We shouldn't be going through life in Lalo land. Just walking around without thinking. He's saying the days are evil. Therefore, it is imperative that you be wise.

And do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Jesus says the very same thing pretty much in Matthew 10. In Matthew 10, he gathers his disciples and he's giving them instructions for how they're going to go and minister.

And initially, he's talking to them. He's going to tell them how to minister in Israel. But as the passage goes on in Matthew 10, he includes all believers as they go into the world.

And he says this, To be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. So it's not a Christian virtue to be naive.

It's not a Christian virtue to be gullible. Jesus says, I send you as sheep among wolves. That's the environment that we live in. We're surrounded by our enemies.

[10:46] Then there's no way that we can think that we're living in a world where we can all hold hands and dance and be happy with one another. We have to be wise or Jesus says we will be devoured.

So wisdom is imperative. And that begs the question, if wisdom is so necessary, how do I get wisdom?

Jesus tells me to be wise. Wise as a serpent. And Paul tells me to be wise. And Proverbs is saying, get wisdom, get understanding. Whatever it costs, get wisdom.

So how do I get it? There's two prerequisites. There's two basic foundational points. And these are both going to be very familiar to you.

But just let them settle in your mind again. Think about them one more time. What is the first?

What's the first, the basic principle, if you're going to be wise?

[11 : 48] You know this. Know God's Word. That is actually my second point. That's very good.

What does Proverbs say?

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. And included in that is receiving God's Word. And so those are going to be our two points, our two prerequisites. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Wisdom begins with understanding and appreciating who the Lord is. That's what it means to fear Him, to respect Him, to honor Him, and not only with your lips, but to have it sunk down in your heart that the Lord is high and lifted up, and I am His creature.

And so you're never going to be wise until you have the right position before the Lord. Listen to what J.I. Packer says.

Never to gain wisdom from God at all.

[13 : 20] So let me ask you. Are you a know-it-all? Are you a know-it-all? Know-it-alls, they don't understand themselves, do they?

They think higher of themselves than they ought. And they don't understand God. The reason they think so high of themselves and they think they are so wise is because they think God's wisdom is close to their own.

And they aren't wise. Proverbs 11, 2 says it this way. When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

So if we're ever going to be wise, we have to beware of pride. Beware of our own self-confidence.

So when we're going into a situation, if we have the feeling like, I have this under control, I don't need God in this situation, then watch out.

Because hard on pride's heels comes disgrace. Disgrace follows quickly after pride. But humility, it attracts wisdom.

[14 : 31] Well, how do I get wisdom? First, fear God. And then what Mickey said is, we have to learn to receive God's Word. And like I said before, these things aren't new.

But are you as wise as you could be? None of us are. So we have to go back to the basics. We have to go back to elementary principles and say, if God is wise, He's the only wise God.

If I'm going to have wisdom, then I need to listen to Him. And He speaks to us in His Word. So soak yourself in Scripture. And that's what Paul told Timothy.

Listen to what he says. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Did you hear the training and the rebuking, the correcting, the teaching?

[15 : 54] Those are wisdom words. Those tell us how the man of God can be equipped to do everything that God has called him to. And this passage does deal specifically with pastors, but I think it certainly has wider applications.

The Word of God prepares the man of God, the pastor, the preacher, to do his work, to do every good work that God calls him to do. But it prepares you to do the work that God has called you to do.

So think about the different ways that you, the two or three things that you spend most of your time doing. Are you a husband? And a father? A mother? A wife?

A teacher? A foreman? A businessman? A factory worker? A truck driver? A grandma? A grandpa?

A deacon? A sister? A brother? The things that we spend the most time at, what God has called us to, the Scripture can make you wise for being those things, for doing those things, to do the good works that God has called us to do.

So brothers and sisters, God says, get wisdom. It costs all you have, get understanding. And God freely gives wisdom at the same time.

[17:15] So we're supposed to strain for it, but at the same time, we're supposed to understand that wisdom is a free gift from God. But He's put that gift in a box, and it's called the Scriptures.

And with any gift, if you're too lazy to open the box, then you're not going to get the present. And if we're too lazy to dig into Scripture, then we will remain fools all of our lives.

If we're not willing to listen to God, then we will remain fools all of our lives. And so, brothers and sisters, let's make the Bible a priority at Grace Fellowship to know it, to love it, to learn it, to memorize it, to meditate on it, to speak to one another in all wisdom.

The way we're going to be built up in wisdom is by being in the Scripture a lot. So wisdom is God's gift. He gives it in the Bible.

And that leads to the next question that we're going to try to answer is what kind of gift is wisdom? What kind of gift is this? What exactly are we talking about?

[18:31] What effect does it have on a person if they are wise? And here is where many totally miss the boat. They want a kind of wisdom that God has not promised them in Scripture.

They want a kind of wisdom that they will never have because of who they are and what they are. They're creatures. And to illustrate what I mean, imagine going up to O'Hare Airport.

So, you're at this giant airport and you can watch the planes taxi in and out of the terminals. And you can see planes landing and planes taking off.

And you can look at the screens, you know, the screens in the hallway saying what flights are early and what flights are late, when flights are departing and when flights are arriving. And you can see, oh, this flight is late or this flight is early.

And if you studied everything from that perspective, after a while, you would get kind of a general idea of how things work and what's going on.

[19:41] Now, suppose you have a friend that works in the air traffic control tower. And he invites you up into the air traffic control tower. And now, everything that was hazy before, you understand.

Because the whole picture is put out there before you. It all snaps into focus. Now you understand why that flight is late or that flight is early. You understand why that flight is sitting there on the tarmac for 20 minutes, not moving, and why all these other planes are going in front of it.

And you understand why, you know, this flight out here is just flying around in circles, waiting like sometimes it happens.

Everything makes sense when you're in the air traffic control tower. Now some folks think the Bible, when it talks about wisdom, is saying that we can have access to the air traffic control tower of the world.

So that we will understand it's like a special invitation to get God's perspective on everything, all the goings-on in the world.

[20:54] And so when they ask for wisdom, what they really want is they want to be able to understand the mysterious things. They want to be able to read the signs and sort out the signs.

And they want to know if they should do this or that. And what happens is when you view wisdom that way, you end up baffled and disappointed.

And when things start going wrong, you chalk it up to the fact that you didn't look closely enough when you were in the air traffic control tower. You weren't reading the signs right.

And you say, well, I need to get back into the control tower so I can see what God wants me to do. And that is not what biblical wisdom is.

It's not getting into the air traffic control tower and understanding everything, the hows and the whys of everything. It's not being able to sort out the signs. It's something very different.

[21:54] Biblical wisdom is something much more humble than that. It's like a driver's ed course. So let's go to Bremen High School.

It's summertime. I think they have driver's ed courses in the summer. And so there we are. There's a bunch of 15-year-olds and they're learning how to drive.

And that's us. That's us in the school of wisdom. It's not a very glorious thing, but it is what God has told us to seek.

Now, to drive well, well, let me ask you. When those kids get into the car to drive and their instructor is sitting there beside them, what are they doing?

What are they thinking? Can you remember back that far? Go, man, go. Go. Right.

[22:59] Your ears are peeled on that instructor. What else are you thinking about? My heart. Okay.

That's nerve-wracking. That doesn't quite fit into my illustration, though. I don't know how that... What else is the students thinking? What else are they thinking?

Roger. Okay.

So they're very concerned about themselves, aren't they? They're concerned about getting their actions correct. That's a lot like wisdom, isn't it? They're thinking, you know what?

I don't want to crash. I don't want to kill everyone in this car on my first day. That's what they're thinking. Now, they aren't wondering when they're driving down the road, they aren't wondering, why did the road turn this way or that?

[24:02] And they aren't thinking, now, why did those construction engineers decide on that particular style of bridge that I just went over? They're not wondering, well, if I turned right here, I wonder where that road would lead me.

their ears are tuned to the instructor. And their eyes are on the road. And to drive well, you don't trouble yourself with the big picture of the whole highway system of the United States.

Do you? You focus on what is directly in front of you. You focus on the situation that you're presently in. And brothers and sisters, that is what wisdom is.

That's what wisdom God has promised us. We let God worry about the highway system of the whole United States. We let God worry about the big picture. And we do our best to handle the situation that we find ourselves in.

And so to live wisely, you must be clear-sighted as to what you are facing. Your eyes have to be on the road, and you have to see reality as it is.

[25:09] You have to be as realistic as possible. Now, God has given us one book in the Bible to teach us how to look at life realistically. Do you know what it is?

To look at life as realistically as possible. Ecclesiastes. And I didn't choose this. I actually wouldn't have chosen this. But this is where J.I. Packer takes us.

So turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes. Wisdom is seeing reality as it is and knowing how to react to it. And so this part is going to be a review for many of you.

But this is where Packer takes us to see what human wisdom is all about. Because Ecclesiastes shows us reality.

It shows us the world that we live in and it shows us ourselves. The point of Ecclesiastes is not to show unbelievers the futility of living without God, although it can do that.

[26:16] The author wants... Ecclesiastes is an older man teaching a younger son from his long years of experience how to look at life.

He's teaching a younger disciple what he has learned and how true wisdom works. And so the young man, I think you could take from Ecclesiastes 12, the young man, as young people have a tendency to do, is they equate book learning with wisdom.

And so the author warns them at the end, of making many books, there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Wisdom isn't found with your face, your nose, in a book.

It's found by honestly looking at the world around you. And the author, who in Hebrew is called Koalath, repeatedly throughout Ecclesiastes. Just flip through it sometimes.

Look at how many times he says, I saw, and I see this, and I saw that, and I looked, and I saw this going on. Now, what is he teaching us?

[27:27] Koalath is saying, look at reality as it is. And what does he find? You're in Ecclesiastes 1, look at verse 2. Ecclesiastes 1, verse 2.

Meaningless, meaningless, says Koalath, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. If you've been here on Sunday night, you know the Hebrew word is Havel.

Havel, Havel, Havel of Havels, everything is Havel. And what is Havel? It's not meaningless in some post-modern sense where things never, ever make sense, finally.

It means futility. It means frustration. It means it's enigmatic. It's very confusing. And it's fleeting.

It's flying by. And Havel is the result of the curse. Creation, says Paul, is groaning in frustration. And that frustration is the Havel that Koalath is talking about.

[28:39] Chapter 1, verse 2, by saying everything is Havel, he's saying this is life. That's life. And this isn't life just for unbelievers.

This is life, period. No matter who you are, no matter where you are, no matter what you do, no matter if you're righteous or wicked, life is like this.

Life is frustrating. It is frustrating in different ways for different people, but it's inexplicable. It's fleeting. It's flying away. And everything that we do under the sun is going to be undone. And that's the message of Ecclesiastes. He's saying, look at reality, see it for what it is. Well, then he begins and he says, now let's take a look at the world. What is the world like that we're living in? And the first thing he says is your life is monotonous. Let's just read verse 4 and onward.

[29 : 44] Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north.

Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams came from, there they return again.

All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, and what has been done will be done again.

There is nothing new under the sun. He says, look at the sun, look at the wind, look at the water. Everything is going around and around and around.

The sun rises and hurries, you know, and sets and then hurries back to where it started again. Why is it in such a hurry? So that it can rise again. And guess what?

[30 : 50] Your life, He is saying, is just like that. You wake up, you go to work and you go to sleep and you wake up and you go to work and you go to sleep again and again and again.

There is nothing new under the sun. There is no escaping the frustration of life. You can't work out of it. You can't finally make things go into a straight line. Life is havel.

It's very difficult. It's very frustrating. And you can't escape life, you can't escape the havel of life through wisdom. Look at verse 18.

Chapter 1, verse 18. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow. The more knowledge, the more grief. Wisdom doesn't help you figure things out.

Wisdom is not getting into the air traffic control tower. Rather, the more you know, the more you hurt. Well, what else is life like?

[31 : 52] Look at chapter 3. It says, there's a time for everything, a season for every activity under heaven.

And he goes through and he describes the times of our lives and then down at verse 11. He says, God has made everything beautiful in its time.

He has also set eternity into the hearts of men. Yet they cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end. So what is life like? Well, it's lived on God's timetable.

And that's good, as Jim says. And sometimes it is very difficult for us to understand how is God working all these things for good.

We can't understand it. What else is life like? Well, it's short and death is coming repeatedly throughout Ecclesiastes.

[32 : 53] Koalath comes back to death. See, death is the ultimate frustration of life, isn't it? It's the guarantee that everything else is going to be frustrating. It's the guarantee that all my work that I do and everything that I accomplished is one day going to be taken from me and given to someone who hasn't worked for it.

And death is frustrating. And when will you die? Turn over to chapter 9. Chapter 9, verse 12.

Remember, what we're looking at is what is life like? Verse 12, chapter 9. Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come.

As fish are caught in the net, in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

So do you understand what Koalath is saying? You have no idea when you're going to die. You aren't guaranteed anything.

[34 : 03] And there are times when that really comes home to us. Those close calls. Those calls from the doctor. And it pops the balloon of our security where we thought, I had this life planned out.

And he's saying, you know what? You're not guaranteed anything. So the fish is swimming along. And all of a sudden it's caught in the net.

And it's in the boat and it's dead. And the bird is flying along. And bam! It's caught in the snare and it's dead.

And that's life. He's saying look at it for what it is. If you want to live wisely, see it as it is. It's short. It's confusing.

It's unsure. It's difficult. It's monotonous. And wisdom sees life for what it is. wisdom reacts in the right way to that reality.

[35 : 07] Wisdom is not pretending like those things don't exist. Wisdom is saying okay, those things do exist. Now this is how I live. So if you've been here on Sunday evening, what does coalesce say?

How should we act towards those things? There's a few things that we've already gone over on Sunday evening. What are some of the ways that he says this is what it means to act wisely in light of reality?

Be prepared. Be prepared to die. I think that might be the biggest point in Ecclesiastes is saying, you know what, you are going to die, so you better be prepared for it.

And the way that you are prepared for it is to live life now. Live light in light of death, because you're going to die. What else does he say? Enjoy God's gifts.

Right. Now is the time that God favors what we do. Now is the time when he's pouring out his gifts on us. If you want to live wisely in the light of all these bad things that reality is, then take his gifts and enjoy them.

[36 : 24] Live on his grace. What else? What else do you know from Ecclesiastes? Yes. Yes.

This is the sum of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments. Obey. That's what it means to live wisely. There's no...

He shuts the door on getting into the air traffic control tower, doesn't he? He says, you're not going in there. You can't go in there. And if you were to go in there, you would be miserable. So what do you do?

You fear God. You stand in awe of his sovereignty and his wisdom. You don't pretend that you are God. You take your place.

And your place is down in submission to him. And then, I think, lastly, you see it in chapter five, you worship God.

[37 : 22] And, you know, I guess you don't have to turn there, but chapter five, one through seven is an extended instruction on how we should worship.

If we're going to live wisely, then worship must be a part of our lives. If we're going to fear God, worship will come. And if we're going to enjoy God's gifts, then we must worship.

And so that is the way of wisdom. It's not getting into the air traffic control tower. It's not being able to read the signs. Real wisdom is seeing reality as it is.

And trusting God in the situation. Trusting God when you can't understand and enjoying his gifts and obeying his commands. And that's the kind of wisdom that God has promised us.

That's the kind of wisdom that we should be seeking. that has a clear-eyed vision of what reality is and also reacts in a way that is honoring to God in it.

[38 : 28] Well, what is the effect of wisdom? If you become wise, what is your life going to be like? Listen to what Packer says. Thus, the effect of his gift of wisdom is to make us more humble, more joyful, more godly, more quick-sighted as to his will, more resolute in the doing of it, and less troubled than we were at the dark and painful things of which life in this fallen world is full.

So you see the bad things in this world. And you're still able to pursue godliness. You're still able to enjoy God's gifts.

So you're joyful. And you're more humble. And that's what wisdom is. And that's the effect of wisdom. And brothers and sisters, we need that kind of wisdom.

We need that kind of wisdom. We don't need to read the signs. We just need to see reality and trust God and obey him. And if we do, then God will be glorified in us.

And so may God be good to us and give us that kind of wisdom. Let's pray. Father, we confess that we are fools.

[40 : 01] Only you know the depth of our foolishness. We're so foolish that we think we are wise. will you forgive us for our high opinions of ourselves.

And will you truly give us this wisdom that the Bible has promised us. If we ask, then you will give it to us according to what James said. And so, Father, we ask that you would give us that kind of wisdom that is from heaven.

It's from above. It's pure, considerate, it's full of good fruit. We want to be wise in that way. Will you help us to be humble?

And if there are some here who are asleep to reality and they think that this life holds all the promise of every good thing that they'll be ever able to enjoy, I pray that you would wake them up and show them how fleeting it all is.

And take away every prop that they have, take away every enjoyment that they have until they come to rest in you, until they seek their wisdom from you.

[41 : 19] Thank you that in Christ we have all the wisdom of God available to us and that we see that wisdom at work in the cross. And I pray that we would live in the light of that gospel wisdom.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.