

Series on the Doctrines of Grace
Romans 11:25-36

Sermon #5
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GOD'S INFALLIBLE WISDOM

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Will you take your Bible and turn to Romans chapter 11, looking especially at verses 33 through 36?
Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!
For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.

In speaking of the doctrines of grace, I am spending some time on the attributes of God. I do this because it is my conviction that people do not understand the grace of God because they never really have taken the time to consider the nature of God. We all have some understanding of what God is like from our reading of the Scriptures, but I have reference to really looking into some of these great themes that we have been considering together. When we understand God, when we understand something of the nature of God, then we are not only in a position to understand ourselves, but we also will begin to see why salvation has to be the way it is, according to what we learn from the Scriptures.

Now I am not taking up all the attributes or characteristics of God separately. I am grouping some of them together, wherever it is possible. I did that, you remember, with the love of God when we saw that it is related to the goodness of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, the longsuffering of God, and the patience of God. If you were to look at some of the books that have been written on the attributes of God, you would find that most of these are taken up separately, and yet they do have a connection with each other.

In this service I want to take up the wisdom of God. We have thought in past Sundays about the grace of God, the sovereignty of God, the righteousness of God, and the love of God. But here in this passage where Paul had finished dealing with the doctrine of salvation, he wrote these words which I have read to you from verses 33 and 35 in Romans chapter 11. You can see that at this point he was overwhelmed with the wisdom of God (look at verse 33), the knowledge of God, the judgments of God, and the ways of God. Now all of these can really be grouped under one heading. Of course, there is a difference between God's knowledge and God's wisdom. His wisdom has to do with the way in which He uses the knowledge Page 2

which He possesses. His judgments are the exercise of His wisdom. And we see the wisdom of God

in His ways, in His dealing with us. So all of these terms are related to the wisdom of God.

When he expressed his praise and his worship and his thanksgiving for the wisdom of God, he asked some questions which we need to answer, questions that are in this passage. The questions in verse 34 are from Isaiah 40:13; the question in verse 35 seems to have been taken from Job 35:7 and/or Job 41:11. Let us look at those questions again, and seek to answer them.

"Who hath known the mind of the Lord?" Of course, the answer is, No one! "Who hath been his counselor?" Where did God get the wisdom to do what He has done? Who advised Him? Was He advised by men? Was He advised by angels? And, of course, the answer is that no one was His counselor. God has done that which was pleasing to Him. "Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again?" And again the answer is that no one first gave to God.

If you were to look at the first two questions as they are found in Isaiah 40, you would see that Isaiah was talking about creation. He raised these questions with regard to creation. But in Romans 11, where the Apostle Paul used those questions, he was not referring to creation; he was thinking about salvation. And that is our concern in this present series of messages. But it is equally true that if you consider the wonders of creation, no man gave God any assistance whatever in bringing them into existence. And, if you consider the wonders of our salvation, man has had no part in them at all. God planned creation by Himself, and He did the same with regard to our salvation.

Another word that has to do with the wisdom of God is the word "understanding." In Psalm 147, verse 5, you will find these words: "Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite."

Now what do these passages teach us about God? We have been considering verses from Isaiah, Job, and the Psalms, and there are many others, of course, that we could include, but I am sure that these will give us enough to have a foundation for understanding something of the wisdom of God.

They mean that God is omniscient, that He knows all things. He is infinitely wise. It is impossible for us to measure that. His ways and His wisdom go far beyond what man can understand. God has known all things from the beginning. As we have seen in the answers to our questions, God conferred with no one when He created the universe, nor when He planned the salvation of sinners. God is a God Who knows all things from the beginning to end. God has never learned anything; He does not need to because He has perfect knowledge. The way many teach the doctrine of salvation makes it necessary for God to be learning some things as time goes on. He is learning who is going to be saved. If He does not know who is going to be saved, then He is not omniscient. But if He knows who is going to be saved, that makes their salvation absolutely certain. But God has never learned anything. He has always been infinite in His understanding, and infinite in His wisdom, infallible in the things that He knows. He can never be mistaken. Nothing ever takes Him by surprise. His wisdom cannot be improved in any way because it is absolutely perfect.

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I think most of you have probably read James Packer's book, Knowing God. If you have not, you ought to. If you have, you know that he gives a definition of wisdom which is really excellent. This is what Dr. Packer says:

What does the Bible mean when it calls God wise? In Scripture wisdom is amoral as well as an intellectual quality, more than mere intelligence or knowledge, just as it is more than mere cleverness or cunning. To be truly wise, in the Bible sense, one's intelligence and cleverness must be harnessed to the right end. Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of

attaining it (p.80).

So you see, God, in exercising His wisdom, had a purpose in mind. He had the opportunity to consider all of the possibilities, and He has chosen the best one. He has chosen the greatest goal that it is possible to achieve, and the surest means of attaining it.

But where do we see the wisdom of God displayed? I am thinking about God's wisdom in a general way. At the close of my message I want to point out particularly what the Word of God has to say concerning His wisdom in salvation. But the Bible indicates at least five different areas where we see God's wisdom, and each one of these five is really inexhaustible. Right now I want to consider these with you, one by one.

I. GOD'S WISDOM IN CREATION

The first is God's wisdom in creation. We have already had a little glimpse of this in Isaiah 40. But in Psalm 104, the 24th verse, you will find these words:

O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all:
the earth is full of Thy riches.

If we had the time I would like to read the 104th Psalm to you. It is a rather lengthy Psalm so I am not going to do it. But I hope that you will read it. Read it along with Isaiah chapter 40. There are several chapters in the Bible that are devoted to creation. And Psalm 104 is one of them. The Psalmist mentioned some of the marvels of creation, and then, as he got down to verse twenty-four, he said this: "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches." So the Psalmist was doing there what the Apostle Paul was doing in Romans chapter eleven, except for the fact that where Paul was reveling in the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge with reference to salvation, the Psalmist in Psalm 104 was thinking of creation. God's wisdom is manifested in creation. Psalm 136, verse 5, the first part of the verse, says, "To him who by wisdom made the heavens." If we went back to the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1, over and over again we would read that God saw what He had made and He said it was either "good" or it was "very good." And that means that it would have been impossible to make a world better than the Lord made it by His wisdom. So we see the wisdom of God in creation.

II. GOD'S WISDOM IN THE BIBLE

But we also see the wisdom of God in the Bible. Now have you ever seen, or heard of, a Book like this? I know that you would agree with me when I say that this is the most wonderful Book in all the world, the most wonderful Book that has ever been written. This is a Book that man by himself would never have been able to Page 4

produce. It is a Book beyond compare. This Book is so far above the wisdom of man that it cannot even be understood apart from the help of its Author, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

How did we get our Bible? Peter tells us in 2 Peter, chapter 1 verse 21, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." In 2 Timothy 3 Paul said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may by perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." In the Word of God we see His infinite wisdom. We would have to examine all of Scripture to see the marvelous things that God has been pleased to reveal to us in His Word. It is in this passage that I have taken as my text where the Apostle Paul said, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" He was not only marveling at the truth of salvation, but he is marveling at the Word of God itself--that God has been pleased to reveal to us such wonderful things.

Psalm 139 is a Psalm of David. He did not get very far in that Psalm before he was speaking of the omniscience of God. And he said, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." The great, infinite, infallible wisdom of God is to be seen everywhere as you look through the Word of God.

III. GOD'S WISDOM IN CHRIST

But there is a third place that we see God's wisdom, and that is in our Lord Jesus Christ. If you still have your Bible open at Romans chapter 11, will you turn over just two or three pages to the first chapter of 1 Corinthians? I want to read a couple of verses to you from that chapter. Paul was writing here about the preaching of the Gospel and about the way in which it was rejected by men as foolishness. But he made a grand declaration in verse 23 and 24 when he said this: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called (that is, the elect), both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Now who would ever have thought that it would have been possible for such a Person as the Lord Jesus Christ to exist--One Who, on the one hand is God, and, on the other hand, is man. You and I have never met a Person like that during our lifetime. But the Lord Jesus Christ is that Person. And as such He manifests the wisdom of God. He is of such infinite importance in the Scriptures that it takes all of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament to tell us about Him. And then the subject is not exhausted. All of the writers of Scripture wrote specifically of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the theme of the Word of God.

You remember how the Lord Jesus with the disciples on the road to Emmaus began at Moses and all the prophets and "he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). And as you go through the New Testament, from Matthew to the book of The Revelation, you find that in a very unique sense the Lord Jesus Christ is the theme of every one of those books.

While the Lord was here on earth the officers of the chief priests and the Pharisees said of Him, "Never a man spake like this man" (John 7:46). At the age of twelve, the Lord Jesus Christ astonished the doctors in the Temple by His Doctrines of Grace -- #5

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understanding and His wisdom. Thus we see that the wisdom of God was displayed both in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who He was, as well as in His words and in His works. The Lord Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God.

IV. GOD'S WISDOM IN PROVIDENCE

But then there is a fourth way in which we see God's wisdom displayed--not only in creation, not only in the Scriptures, not only in Christ, but in God's providence. Over the history of the whole world can be written those words in Psalm 18:30, "As for God, his way is perfect; the Word of the Lord is tried, he is a buckler to all those who trust in him." But those same words can be written over David's life, who wrote Psalm 18. Sometimes it seems like things are very unjust that God brings into the lives of His people. Take for example the life of Job. And yet Job, right in the midst of his afflictions and sufferings, said, "But he knoweth the way that I take, when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). And Job was giving expression to what all of us experience when we go through difficult times. And yet as time goes on and we see the wisdom of God at work in our lives, we know that He has an infinitely greater purpose for our lives than we ever had. The result of His wise ways with us is that we are going to be perfected more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Job could look forward to the future without any fear because he added just a few verses after this in Job 23:14, "For He performeth the thing that is appointed for me; and many such things are with Him." So as Job looked at his life, he saw the hand of God, the wise hand of God,

God working to accomplish His wonderful purposes.

And who has not been thrilled in reading through the Scriptures to see God's ways with a person like Joseph? He seemed to be the victim of the hatred of his brothers. They sold him as a slave into the land of Egypt. And yet we see that God had a purpose in all that, an infinitely wise purpose: to spare His people. And later on, when his brothers had to come down for food and they stood before him, he was able to tell them because he understood the wisdom of God, "It was not you that sent me hither, but God" (Gen. 45:8a). "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth" (Gen. 45:7a). The very thing that his brothers did, sinful in itself, to do away with Joseph, was a manifestation of the infinite wisdom of God.

Paul was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh because he was given an experience that was liable to cause his heart to be lifted up with pride. And he besought the Lord that that thorn in the flesh might be taken away from him. You see, even in that, there was a questioning of the wisdom of God. But God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9a). And Paul's response was, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

So we see all of these testimonies to the faithfulness of God and the wisdom of God in providence. When you trace the whole history of man from creation to the new heaven and the new earth, you will never find anything but absolute perfection in the way God works out His infallible wisdom. And this is a truth that every single one of us should take to heart.

Let me read you just a few words from Stephen Charnock who lived back in the sixteen hundreds, and who wrote a very wonderful book called, The Existence and Page 6

the Attributes of God. He has ninety pages on the knowledge of God, and he has over one hundred pages on the wisdom of God. This is what he said with reference to the attributes of God in general. He said:

The glorious attributes of God bear a comfortable respect (meaning, a beneficial effect) to believers . . . We should never think of the excellencies of the divine nature without considering the duties they demand, and gathering the honey they present.

Now what is the honey concerning the wisdom of God? Well, the honey, of course, is the peace and the joy which comes from knowing that God in His wisdom is always doing the best possible thing for us, at the best time, in the best way, and for the best purpose. Now be sure to apply that to your circumstances right now because I am sure that if we were questioned about the circumstances of our lives all of us here would change some things if we possibly could. There are some things that God is doing with us that we do not like, some things that we do not understand. Maybe there are some questions in our minds concerning God's dealing with us as far as the past is concerned. But if we understand what the wisdom of God is, that ought to clear the clouds away. It does not mean that our circumstances are going to be easy, that our trials are going to pass over us almost unnoticed. But it means that there can be joy and peace and blessing in the midst of it all. That is the honey; that is the honey of the wisdom of God.

But what are the duties that the wisdom of God demands of us? Well, the duties are our faith and our obedience to God. If God is infinitely wise in all that He does, if He is always seeking our best, if He always works all things together for good, if He is preparing us for the highest goal possible, which is conformity to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we need to trust Him through all of the experiences of our lives and to render to Him daily obedience according to His wonderful Word. So here we see something of the benefits that come to us from knowing God and understanding these great attributes of God.

V. GOD'S WISDOM IN SALVATION

Now I come to the last point. This has to do with the doctrine of salvation. And I want to remind you that we are talking about the doctrines of grace which really is the doctrine of salvation. We are talking about the sovereign way in which God is working out His redemptive plan among men. And here we see that God is infallibly wise, infinitely wise, always wise, and never anything else. And, in planning our salvation, if we go back to our definition, God has by His unerring wisdom chosen the best way to reach the highest of all goals along with the surest means of attaining it. So, in the fifth place we see God's wisdom in salvation. It was this, as we have seen in our text, that brought forth from Paul's heart the words of praise and amazement and delight at the salvation that God has ordained!

What does this wonderful theme include? It includes all of the doctrines of grace. When we talk about the doctrines of grace (in case there are some who do not understand), we are talking about man in his natural condition, alienated from God, at enmity with God, dead in trespasses and sins. We see that God has taken the initiative in salvation. He had to! It is God Who has to bring men to Himself by His wonderful grace. There is no other way that salvation would have worked. It had to be of God. It could never have been of us. And, therefore, all of the glory and all of the honor and all of the praise belongs to Him. This is why Paul Doctrines of Grace -- #5

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wrote the words which you and I have been considering in our text for today-- ascribing all of the glory for our great salvation to God, and to God alone!

Now what will it do to you? It will do just exactly to you what the truth had done to the Apostle Paul in this passage. His heart was overflowing with praise and thanksgiving to God for the marvelous salvation that He has provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so he said, "For of him (He is the source), and through him (He is the means), and to him (He is the great objective) are all things." And remember, he was referring here specifically to all things that have to do with our salvation. He is the source of it all. He is the One Who will see that this work is carried out. And it is all to His praise and glory--all of it designed by His infinite wisdom, "to whom be glory forever. Amen."

I trust that you are beginning to see why we need to know something about the attributes of God before we can begin to comprehend His wonderful works and His ways.

As I close I want to read two prayers to you from the Bible: one from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament. Will you turn to the book of Daniel for the first prayer? I want you to see what Daniel had to say about the wisdom of God in Daniel, chapter 2, and verse 19. Daniel was given a revelation from God, the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. And notice the effect that this had upon him:

Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee, and praise thee, O Thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter (Dan. 2:19-23).

You see, when Daniel was brought to an understanding of the wisdom of God, it made a worshipper out of him. When he saw the unfolding of God's plan and purpose, he knew that all wisdom belonged to God. And he knew that the only reason he was able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream was because God had given the wisdom to him. And so here he is blessing the God of

heaven.

The second prayer is in the last chapter of the book of Romans. And here the Apostle Paul really was finished with his exposition of this great truth of salvation. I want you to see again that the knowledge of God's wisdom made a worshipper out of him. The last three verses of Romans 16, the last three verses of the book of Romans, are a doxology:

Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

The Apostle Paul, who probably knew more about salvation than anybody else who has ever lived on the earth, except for our Lord Jesus Christ, in coming to understand Page 8

the wisdom of God in salvation, was brought to glorify God through Jesus Christ as the only wise God, the only One Who is deserving of the praise and glory that men must give for their salvation. If man had had any part in it, then all of the glory could not have been given to God. But because salvation was a work of God from start to finish, and still is a work of God from start to finish, I trust that you and I will say with Paul, "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen."