

Infinitely Wise

Psalm 104:24–35, Romans 11:25–36

This is the sixth in a series on Q&A 4 of the Shorter Catechism, “What is God?” The profound answer: “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” Previous messages: “God Is a Spirit,” “God Is Infinite,” “God Is Eternal,” “God Is Unchangeable” and “The God Who Is.” Today we consider the teaching that God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in *wisdom*. Our first point is:

1. Seen in creation

Our Old Testament text is from Psalm 104, a Psalm that praises the Lord for his glorious works of creation and providence. One author observes that Psalm 104 is like a poetic version of Genesis 1, the first chapter in the Bible.¹ The first chapter of Genesis describes God’s work of creation in terms of the specific things that God spoke into existence on the first six days: light; the firmament of the heavens; the dry land; the seas; vegetation; the sun, moon and stars; fish and sea creatures; the birds of the heavens; the livestock; creeping things; beasts of the earth; and ultimately man, male and female, created in the image of God himself.

Psalm 104 describes God covering himself with light and stretching out the heavens like a curtain; laying the beams of his upper chambers in the waters; making the clouds his chariot; walking on the wings of the wind; creating the angelic spirits; laying the foundations of the earth; covering it with the deep as with a garment; making the waters stand above the mountains; setting a boundary for the seas, so that they would not return to inundate the earth (the fear of radical environmentalists in our day). God sends springs into the valleys, flowing among the hills, giving drink to the beasts of the field, where the birds of the heaven have their home, singing among the branches. Our loving Father waters the hills from his upper chambers, causing grass to grow for cattle, food for man, wine that gladdens his heart, oil that makes his face shine and bread that strengthens his heart. The sun and moon give us day and night and the seasons of the year, enabling man to do his work. This is poetic language that draws to mind the reader’s own interaction with the creation and causes the worshiper to meditate on God’s greatness. Truly, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth.” No matter where man lives, or what language he speaks, the earth and the heavens are an open book revealing the glory of God.

¹ *Family Worship Bible Guide* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 117

Our reading of Psalm 104 this morning began with verse 24: “O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In *wisdom* You have made them all.” Here, the Psalmist makes the point that the creation of the universe, with its rich variety of wonders, is a display of God’s glorious wisdom: not only is God infinitely great, he is infinitely wise.

This is confirmed in a couple other Old Testament texts. Psalm 136: “To him that by *wisdom* made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.” Also Proverbs 3:19: “The LORD by *wisdom* hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.” How reassuring to know that in creating all things God not only designed a system where everything works flawlessly, it also reflects his higher purposes. Psalm 145 states: “All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.” The redeemed will spend eternity praising God for his wisdom reflected in his glorious work of creation.

2. God only wise

Not only is God infinite in wisdom, he’s also the sole possessor of wisdom. Consider these texts:

Romans 16:27, “To *God only wise*, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.”

1 Timothy 1:17, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, *the only wise God*, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Jude 1:25, “To *the only wise God* our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

Isn’t it significant that both Paul and and Jude, writing in the New Testament, make the point that God alone is wise? Moreover, this observation is the subject of praise: because God is infinite in wisdom, he eternally possesses honor, glory, majesty, dominion and power. That being so, isn’t it proper for *us* to glorify God for his wisdom? As we worship him, dear saints of God, let us praise him for his wisdom.

3. Wisdom contrasted with knowledge

What is wisdom? Wisdom is the right *use* of knowledge. God’s knowledge is vast. His knowledge is encyclopedic—actually *more* than encyclopedic! God knows everything about everything. The theological term for this is *omniscience*: God is all-knowing.

I read an article about a new palm payment system that uses scanning technology to allow customers to make purchases without opening their wallets. Imagine going into a store and holding your hand over a palm reader. The reader recognizes you and deducts the amount of your purchases from your account. You don’t even have to open your wallet. Such technology could also provide entry into buildings. But convenience comes at a cost: the loss of privacy. The owners of the technology say it will limit data collection and will not share user data unless it is

required to comply with a legal order. But there will be incentives to monetize our personal information. Customers who value privacy over convenience would rather pay in cash, as long as we still have that option. We are wary of other people knowing everything about us. But God is all-knowing. Our lives are an open book to him! He knows the thoughts and intents of our heart. He knows our motives, plans and purposes. He knows everything we do and say. At the final judgment the books will be opened, and every person will give account to God. God will render perfect judgment in light of his comprehensive knowledge.

But not only is God all-knowing, he is also wise. Paul in Romans confirms this: “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!” The apostle waxes eloquent as he teaches that the true God not only possesses infinite knowledge but also infinite wisdom. God not only knows the true facts about everything, he also knows how to make right judgments about those facts. The believer is taught to say, “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right” (Ps. 119:128). Whatever God’s Word teaches about any subject is “right.” *Right* has two senses: (1) conforming to facts or truth, and (2) being in accordance with what is just, good, or proper. God’s Word is right in both senses: whatever God’s Word teaches about any subject is factually correct; it is also morally correct.

Wisdom is knowing how to *use* knowledge. Wisdom is the ability to discern and judge what is true and right. It is insight, good judgment, the ability to apply biblical principles to the situations we face. Facts matter—and we ought to try our best to get our facts straight—but the man or woman taught by the Spirit is enabled to use knowledge aright (more on this in just a little bit).

4. Solomon and Christ

This is exemplified in wise King Solomon. In 1 Kings 3:16ff. we read that two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him. One woman said, “O my lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then it happened, the third day after I had given birth, that this woman also gave birth. And we were together; no one was with us in the house, except the two of us in the house. And this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from my side, while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead. But when I had examined him in the morning, indeed, he was not my son whom I had borne.” Then the other woman said, “No! But the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son.” And the first woman said, “No! But the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son.” Thus they spoke before the king. And the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son, who lives, and your son is the dead one’; and the other says, ‘No! But your son is the dead one, and my son is the living

one.” Then the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other.” Then the woman whose son was living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, “O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!” But the other said, “Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him.” So the king answered and said, “Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother.”

Here were two harlots coming before King Solomon, both claiming to be the mother of the living son—what to do? The king could not order a DNA test. It was a matter requiring Solomonic wisdom! Solomon answered wisely, and all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered. They feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of *God* was in him to administer justice.

Solomon is the prime Old Testament example of wisdom. Jesus said, “The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed *a greater than Solomon is here.*”² It would be conceited for a person to say, “I’m greater than Solomon”—in essence, saying, “I’m the wisest person in the world”—but when Jesus said this, he was only telling the truth. Solomon was a great example of wisdom. In 1 Kings 3 the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and said, “Ask! What shall I give you?” Solomon’s response showed true humility. He said, “I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. . . . Therefore give . . . Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” God was pleased with his answer and granted his request. When the two harlots appeared before Solomon, petitioning him to judge their case, he correctly discerned the living child’s true mother. Solomon is the author-compiler of the book of Proverbs, the Bible’s treasury of wisdom. Now Jesus comes along and claims to be greater than King Solomon. This was not the inflated opinion of a narcissist but God’s honest truth, for in 1 Corinthians 1:24 the apostle Paul declares, “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). Do you want to gain a heart of wisdom? Then look to Christ, for indeed he is the wisdom of God incarnate.

5. Man’s wisdom is unreliable.

God is good—the essence of goodness. The Psalmist invites us to “taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Ps. 34:8). But man is *corrupt*. Genesis observes that “the earth also was *corrupt* before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was *corrupt*; for all flesh had *corrupted* his way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:11–12).

² Matt. 12:42, cf. Luke 11:31

Moreover, we read, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are *corrupt*, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good” (Ps. 14:1).

Corrupt means *in a state of decay, morally debased*. If a computer file becomes corrupted, it will not work properly; it is unreliable. If fresh vegetables or fruit become corrupt, they are not fit to eat. This time of year we get some of the finest, most glorious tomatoes. Norma and I have some wonderful grape tomatoes growing in our backyard this year. Biting into a fresh-picked tomato fills the mouth with a burst of satisfying flavor. Yet if you happen to get one that has spoiled, you spit it out instantly. It is corrupt. It may look good on the outside, but it is corrupt within, and your taste buds know it instantly.

Scripture speaks of men corrupting themselves and making graven images; it speaks of “lying and corrupt words,” of “men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth.” The natural man’s knowledge is corrupt, his perspective is skewed, his conclusions are unreliable.

“Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matt. 7:17–18).

The creation God placed us in functions like a beautiful clock, with every gear and cog functioning perfectly. This all happens automatically, whether we are awake or asleep. No one studying the creation would naturally conclude that the beautiful and amazing world we live in just *happened*. The only way a person would conclude that is if he or she had a preconceived notion, was committed to the idea that there is no God.

No one studying human sexuality would conclude that there are more than two genders. “God made man male and female”: nature itself teaches that. Sex is not *assigned* at birth, it is *observed* and *recorded* at birth—yet there are intelligent people today who cannot answer the question *what is a woman*. One of our Supreme Court justices professes not to know. If she doesn’t have her facts straight, how can we trust her conclusions?

Man’s knowledge is corrupt. He doesn’t have perfect, comprehensive knowledge. Contrary to all the evidence around them, but trained by the schools to accept evolution as a proven fact, millions of people claim to be atheists, but no finite person has infinite knowledge. No one on Planet Earth knows enough to declare with certainty that God does not exist. The creation declares the glory of God, but through sin the mind of man has become corrupted, and refuses to recognize the obvious.

6. Practical uses

So why do we need wisdom? Can’t we just quote a proof text from the Bible and settle every matter? It’s not quite that easy. Consider Proverbs 26:4–5,

“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.” Many a new Christian, reading the book of Proverbs, is stumped, wondering if there is an error in the Bible. There are *no* errors in the Bible, but applying these verses requires wisdom. Essentially, the question is: when to answer, when to be quiet; when to do which? In the course of life the child of God encounters people the Bible calls “fools.” A fool is a person who hates knowledge (Prov. 1:22); he does not delight in understanding (18:2); to do evil is like sport to him (10:23); his heart proclaims foolishness (12:23); his mouth pours it forth (15:2); he feeds on it (15:14).³ Here is a person who is resolute and unwavering in unbelief, zealous in his hatred of God. As God’s people encounter such people and hear them rail against God, they must not adopt their opponents’ tactics, lest they be like them. Their opponents are acting hatefully; the Christian must not be hateful. The Lord Jesus exposed his enemies as “fools” and “blind guides”—certainly unflattering terms—but he did it not out of hate but out of a desire to be clear and glorify God. He always answered his enemies in a manner befitting their folly; he didn’t let them walk away, thinking themselves wise in their own conceit.

Whether as individual Christians, or members of church sessions, all of us regularly face situations that require manifest wisdom, situations where one or another course of action might be the godly and Christlike thing to do, depending on a right interpretation of the factors.

A parent might confront a naughty, defiant child. He or she might think, I’ve already spanked him for this; should I spank him again, or send him to his room and take away privileges? Which would be the wisest, most productive course in this case? Often, when we need wisdom, we don’t have a lot of time to leisurely consider the matter!

With a son who has gotten in trouble with the police, do I bail him out, or let him stay in jail till he appears in court—not always an easy thing to determine.

With an invitation to attend a wedding or other religious service in a pagan temple—should I go, or send my regrets? On the one hand, I want to signal that I want to be friends, on the other hand, I don’t want to give the impression that I approve of a false religion. Here is a matter that requires wisdom.

How can we grow in wisdom? One way is to read the Proverbs—not always an easy book to read, since it is like facing a machine gun of data all at once. There’s so much there, we sometimes throw up our hands in frustration. Where to start? As we read, we should read prayerfully: “God, I want to grow to be more like you. Show me a principle that you want me to focus on right now.” Choose one proverb to meditate on for a time—perhaps for a week or more. Write it down on a note

³ References from Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon, לִּבְיָל (Logos Bible Software)

card in your own handwriting and carry it with you. Meditate on it and pray for opportunities to put it into practice. You cannot easily master the book of Proverbs, but that's no excuse to neglect it. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Take that step, pray for humility and begin to put that single proverb into practice. Hang onto your note cards; after awhile you will be able to go over them again and measure your progress.

Another way we can grow in wisdom is to consider a multitude of wise counselors. "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14). The place to begin to discover wise counselors is the body of Christ. God is infinitely wise; no individual Christian possesses all wisdom, but he has promised to lead his church into all truth.

The acquisition of wisdom is a daunting task. The only one who has it perfectly is the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior who died for us, that we might live with him forever, saying with the saints, "Amen: Blessing, and glory, and *wisdom*, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."