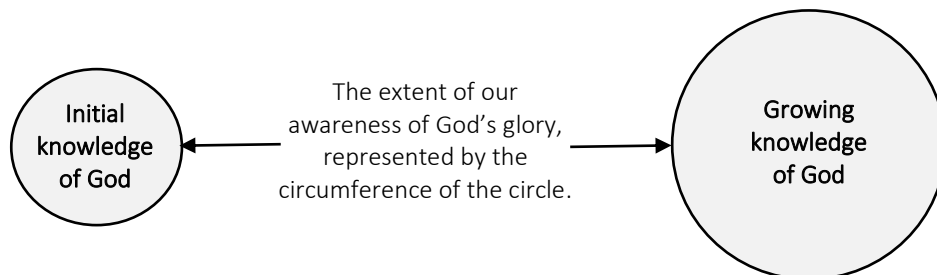


**“Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him.”  
—Daniel 2:20 (NASB)**

The question is not unusual: “Why is it that the more I study God, the more ignorant I seem to become?” The experience can be downright discouraging. Despite investing significant effort in learning, the growing impression is that we are only becoming more ignorant. Yet in reality, this very experience often points to the opposite. Not only does sincere study of the doctrine of God produce the humility it takes to become a true theologian, but it also expands our understanding to the immensity and grandeur of God.

To explain this point, theologians use the illustration of a circle to represent our knowledge of God. When we know only a little of Him, the circumference of the circle is relatively small. That circumference represents our exposure to who God is in His glory and incomprehensibility. In other words, to know little of God means to know little of His grandeur; to know little of God means to be unaware of how much there is yet to learn. But as one’s circle of knowledge grows, so does the circumference. Consequently, the more one studies and knows God, the more one becomes aware of His incomprehensibility. And because God is beyond our comprehension, we will never exhaust the opportunity to grow; the circle of knowledge will continue to increase, but as it does, we will also be exposed more and more to what we don’t know. Thus, the growing impression of ignorance of God’s glory ends up being one of the greatest indications of true growth in knowledge.



With respect to the perfection of God’s wisdom, we encounter another one of these experiences. The more we study it, the more we realize how little we still know.

## I. Definition of “Divine Wisdom”

### A. What wisdom means.

**The wisdom of God refers to the perfect manner by which He achieves His purposes.**

It is important to remember that God’s perfections are indivisible; He is not comprised of ingredients. In other words, there is never an instance wherein God is loving but not righteous, sovereign but not good, omnipresent but not faithful. Thus, when we speak of God’s *wisdom* we must always do so within the context of all His perfections. Nonetheless, in God’s wisdom we see on display especially God’s attributes of **omniscience** (His perfect and absolute knowledge of all things), **omnipotence** (His ability to accomplish anything He pleases, without ever depleting His power), and **goodness** (God’s disposition to treat His creation with profound generosity). **These attributes in particular manifest themselves in the way by which God accomplishes His purposes.** J. I. Packer draws out an element of this when he writes, “Wisdom without power would be pathetic, a broken reed; power without wisdom would be merely frightening; but in God boundless wisdom and endless power are united, and this makes him utterly worthy of our fullest trust” (*Knowing God*, 91).

Therefore, with respect to God’s wisdom, we are reminded that:

- **God knows all things**—He knows the most glorious purposes for which creation and all its parts exist.
- **God can do all things**—He never lacks the resources to achieve these purposes.
- **God does all things well**—He always employs His power with perfect skill to achieve these purposes.

Help for understanding God’s *wisdom* can be found in the biblical terms used to refer to it. The primary word used for “wisdom” in the Old Testament is the Hebrew term *hokmāh* (חִכְמָה). The word refers to “skill in technical matters; practical experience” (*HALOT*, 1.314). One writer defines the term as “a practical knowledge that helps one know how to act and how to speak in different situations. Wisdom entails the ability to avoid problems, and the skill to handle them when they present themselves” (Tremper Longman, *How to Read Proverbs*, 14–15). In other words, the word describes *the art of living well*. The New Testament term, *sophia* (σοφία), also denotes a similar emphasis as its Old Testament counterpart: “the capacity to understand and function accordingly” (BDAG, 934). It is knowledge rightly applied in varying situations.

**WISDOM:**  
God’s perfect skill in  
achieving His purposes

Both these biblical terms are used with reference to God. They are used to highlight **God’s skill and success in accomplishing all His purposes**—from the smallest to the greatest. He not only knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10), but He knows the perfect way to get creation from the beginning to the end with all its different storylines and characters involved. He never has to rewrite a scene. He never forgets a movement. He never overextends or underperforms. Unlike man’s wisdom, which is typically developed through the process of trial and error or failure and correction, God’s wisdom is immutable—He never makes mistakes, learns, or improves in His skill. **God’s ends (purposes) are always right; His means (resources) are never inadequate; His ways (strategies) are always good.** Because of this, God is all-wise—or as theologians sometimes call it, *omnisapient* (from the Latin *omni*, “all,” + *sapio*, “to be wise”).

“God is infinitely wise, because He selects the best possible end of action . . . [and] because He adopts the best possible means for the accomplishment of the end which he has in view.”

—J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 86–87

## B. What God’s wisdom does not mean.

God’s omnisapience is commonly scorned by unbelievers. Considering themselves to be experts in matters of justice, they heap scorn on God for the difficulties they encounter in life. They believe that if God is indeed all-wise, He would use His power to fulfill every one of their felt needs. But He doesn’t, so they arrogantly conclude that God is the opposite of wise—He is unfair, if not foolish. Like the Israelites of old, they “grumble in their tents,” claiming that their hardship is because “God hates them” (cf. Deut 1:27).

But even believers question God’s wisdom at times—as Job’s own story demonstrates. They misunderstand what omnisapience means and how it must manifest itself in a fallen creation. Some of the more common misunderstandings include:

- 1) **That God is all-wise does not mean that His good purposes must be instantly realized (see Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 5:6).** Believers are sometimes quick to demand answers to “why” questions the moment they encounter pain. If they cannot find an answer, they doubt that their hardship has anything to do with wisdom. The expectation is that as soon as pain is felt, its purpose must be realized or at least revealed. But in contrast to this, God’s wisdom must be seen in terms of *outworking*—that He is *causing all things to work together for good*, and that this good will be revealed *in its proper time*.
- 2) **That God is all-wise does not mean that He cannot utilize the evil actions of others to achieve His good purposes (see Genesis 50:20).** It is often assumed that God’s righteousness precludes Him from having any connection whatsoever to that which is evil. Consequently, any evil that is encountered can have no possible positive outcome. Yet the perfection of God’s wisdom is manifest precisely in the fact that He can use crooked sticks to draw straight lines, all the while remaining perfectly righteous. As the

patriarch Joseph strikingly exclaimed, “you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result” (Gen 50:20).

- 3) **That God is all-wise does not mean that He is responsible for the evil that occurs (see James 1:13).** The question is often asked, “If God is all wise, why is there evil in creation?” Or it is thought that if God utilizes the evil actions authored and performed by others to bring about His own good purposes, then He is complicit in that evil in some way. These issues are indeed difficult for our limited minds to resolve, but God has clearly testified to the fact that: (a) He is never the author of evil, but that (b) He ordains it to His glorious purposes. This is a paradoxical truth for us, but not for Him. It is precisely because God is immeasurably more wise than we are that these truths can be true and glorious.
- 4) **That God is all-wise does not mean that He must answer to an external standard of wisdom (see Proverbs 21:30; Romans 9:20).** Believers can sometimes operate as if God’s providences are to be judged according to a standard of wisdom that exists outside of Him, and that God is to be deemed “wise” insofar as He conforms to this external, universal standard. In fact, every time when God’s providence is questioned, the questioner assumes God can be called to the stand and judged according to this supposed external law. But God Himself is the source and standard of all wisdom; it cannot exist apart from Him. All expressions of “wisdom” originate in Him, and the wisdom of all actions are judged according to the standard of His actions. Whatever God does is wise, which implies that the *means* that God uses to achieve His purposes—even if they don’t make sense to us—are always the *best* means, and they are the best means specifically because God *has chosen them*.

## II. Biblical Testimony to God’s Wisdom

The biblical testimony to God’s wisdom can be summarized according to at least five categories.

- A. **God Himself is the source of all wisdom.** The Scriptures are unequivocal: wisdom never originates outside of God, but all true expressions of it find their source in Him. In fact, wisdom is not merely a quality of God in general, but of each of the Persons of the Godhead in particular. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all described as *perfectly wise*.
  - *God the Father:* Job 9:1–4; 12:13, 16–22; 28:12–28; Proverbs 2:6; 8:22–24; 21:30; Isaiah 40:28; Daniel 2:20–23; Romans 11:33–34; 16:25, 27; James 1:5; Revelation 7:12
  - *God the Son:* 1 Corinthians 1:23–24; 30–31; Colossians 2:3; Revelation 5:12
  - *God the Spirit:* Isaiah 11:1–2; Ephesians 1:17–19
- B. **God’s wisdom is displayed in the beauty of creation.** The biblical writers looked on the beauty of all that has been made and quickly concluded that only the wisdom of God could be responsible for it all.
  - Genesis 1:31; Job 38–41; Psalm 19:1–2; Psalm 104:24; 136:5; 139:15–16; Proverbs 3:19; 8:22–31; Isaiah 40:26; Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15.
- C. **God’s wisdom is manifested in the intricacies of providence.** God’s omniscience is displayed not only in bringing a complex creation into existence, but also in how He continues to sustain it and move it toward its perfect end. The Scriptures testify to the fact that He does this with pure skill.
  - Genesis 50:20; Psalm 33:10–11; Proverbs 16:1, 4, 9, 22; 21:1; Ecclesiastes 3:11a; Daniel 2:20–22; Acts 17:26–28; Romans 8:28.
- D. **God’s wisdom is apexed in the incarnation of the Son.** There can hardly be a more profound expression of perfect wisdom than in the incarnation and mission of the Son of God. Everything from the fulfillment of ancient prophecies of His coming, to the mystery of the hypostatic union, to the wonder of the virgin birth, to the achievement of the atonement—and much more—testifies to God’s unfathomable wisdom.
  - Galatians 4:3–6; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30–31; Colossians 2:3

- E. **God's wisdom is vindicated in the salvation of sinners.** The impeccability of God's wisdom in comparison to man's is vindicated poignantly in His redemption of sinners. What the greatest, most learned men of the world cannot do, God does with skill and delight. He puts His wisdom on display by saving those least worthy in the world's eyes, by using them as His partners in His grand design of redemption, and then by transforming them into the likeness of His Son in glory.

- 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 25; Ephesians 3:8–10; Romans 8:29–30

### III. What God's Wisdom Demands from Us

- A. **God's wisdom should be the cause of fervent worship.** Whenever we consider the work of His hands, whether it be the beauty of fractals, His governance of the nations, or the glorious nature of the atonement, we ought to respond in profound adoration.
- Psalm 136:5; Daniel 2:20–22; Romans 11:33–34; Revelation 5:12; 7:12
- B. **God's wisdom should make it easy for us to be content in our circumstances.** When we complain about our hardships, we typically do not question God's omnipotence. Instead, we question either His goodness or His *wisdom*. By pushing back against God's hand of providence, we imply that we are wiser than He is about what is *best for us* and attempt to make ourselves into God's counselors. But when we recognize and embrace God's omnisapience, we find rest for our souls, even in the most painful of circumstances.
- Isaiah 40:13–14 (Romans 11:34); Romans 9:20
  - Deuteronomy 29:29; Proverbs 3:5–6; Isaiah 55:8–9; Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 4:19
- C. **God's wisdom should motivate us to acquire the wisdom He shares.** Wisdom is a communicable attribute; God is glorified by sharing it with His image-bearers. As we acquire it, we will increasingly develop the skill to live life successfully. First and foremost, it will be acquired through prayer and study of His Word.
- Proverbs 2:6–8; 4:5, 7; 8:1–4, 10–11, 19; Daniel 2:20–23; James 1:5
  - Job 28:12–28; Psalm 111:10; 119:98–100; Proverbs 9:10; 15:33; 2 Timothy 3:15–17

### For Further Study

**Memorize:** Daniel 2:20; James 1:5

**Sing:** "Whate'er My God Ordains Is Right" (*Hymns of Grace* #66)

**Pray:** Adore God for the skill He manifests in creation and providence. Confess His impeccable wisdom in all He has done in history, in all He is doing in your life, and in all that He will do in the future. Confess sins of grumbling over your circumstances. Ask Him to give you a surer trust in His wisdom and the contentment you need to rest and be happy in your circumstances.

#### Discuss:

- 1) In your own words, define God's "wisdom."
- 2) Review the section above describing what God's wisdom does *not* mean. Which of those four errors are you most prone to express whenever you face discomforts. Consider why this is so.
- 3) Meditate on Psalm 104:24. Then take time this week to examine some aspect of God's creation or providential activity. Record the ways God's wisdom is manifest in it and be ready to share it with others.
- 4) Prayerfully examine your level of contentment in your current circumstances. How does any lack of contentment reflect weakness in your understanding of God's omnisapience?
- 5) How will understanding this perfection of God equip you to respond to painful circumstances in the future?
- 6) How is the priority of acquiring God's wisdom manifested in your priorities and daily practices?

**Audio, video, and handouts for this session:** [gracechurch.org/motw](http://gracechurch.org/motw)

**Next meeting:** 7pm, March 29, Evening of Prayer (no livestream); refreshments on the patio begin at 6:15pm