



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Knowledge and Wisdom of God, part II”

...to have a chance to chat with him, even though he knew that he was not going to recover from the sickness.

Now tonight we are continuing and concluding our study on the knowledge and wisdom of God; and we are seeking to answer such questions as, “What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?” And why does the Bible say, “Be ye holy and not be ye happy?” And other such questions.

The incommunicable attributes, remember, stressed his absolute being and the communicable attributes, among which are the attributes of knowledge and wisdom, are those that stress his personal nature by which he enters into relation with others. And for some of you who were not here earlier we have been proceeding with a discussion of the incommunicable ones -- and the nine that are listed in the left hand column -- we have finished with and we are now in the discussion of the communicable attributes, and dealing particularly with those that have to do with the mind; the mental communicable attributes. And we have looked at knowledge, and tonight we are going to look at the attribute, which is closely related to it, the attribute of wisdom.

Now just a word of review before we move on. Last time when we were looking at this subject, we looked first at the nature of the knowledge of God, we sought to define

it. Then we pointed out several things about the knowledge of God. It is intuitive and not discursive. That is, it is not obtained by comparing one thing with another or by deducing one thing from another. God does not have to do that. He knows all in one direct vision. It is simultaneous and not successive. God does not receive his wisdom by drops. The perception is total and instantaneous. It is independent not dependent. He has no books or no -- and he has no tutor, no one taught him his knowledge. He did not learn it by experience. It is distinct not indistinct. He is infinitely clear in his knowledge and his knowledge is infinitely clear and complete.

It is infallible, not fallible as regarding certainty in knowledge is infinite or infallible, what he knows is as certain as what he says. It is immutable not mutable, his knowledge does not change for he does not grow wiser, he does not forget as the years pass by; as so often happens with some of us who are becoming ancient in days also. It is complete not incomplete. There is no acquiring and no forgetting but as the Psalmist says, “his understanding is infinite.”

Then we discussed the extent of the knowledge of God; trying to point out of course that he is omniscient but going beyond that and answering some questions that arise among those who meditate upon such things. His knowledge is both necessary and free. We pointed out that the necessary knowledge of God is the knowledge of all things possible and that rests upon the consciousness of his omnipotence and his omniscience. This is the kind of knowledge that is not determined by an act of his will. It is the kind of thing that he knows by an act of the intellect. His free knowledge is the knowledge of all things actual, the things that are the result of the action of his will, things that are true because he has decreed them to be so.

This is his free knowledge, and he has knowledge of both that which is necessary and that which is free. We also pointed out that his knowledge is of himself. That the ultimate object of knowledge is God. In this he excels all the creatures. If he did not have this he would be under the greatest ignorance because he would be ignorant of the

most excellent object, and so since his knowledge is perfect and since it is of the most excellent object it is knowledge ultimately that includes all the knowledge of himself. And thus his knowledge is of all things. He is omniscient.

Then we discussed some problems in the knowledge of God. Can God foreknow the free action and thus can he foreknow conditional events? We pointed out that he couldn’t foreknow conditional events. It is easy to see that he may foreknow necessary actions. It is difficult to understand how he can foreknow actions that man freely originates. We pointed out that there is a conflict and there has existed a conflict for centuries over the foreknowledge of God and human freedom, and there are those who affirm the foreknowledge of God on one hand but who affirm on the other hand that there is no such thing as a free action on the part of man; and then there are those who stress human free action, human freedom, and do not acknowledge that God has foreknowledge.

Now I pointed out that as far as I was concerned; I believed that God has decreed all things with their causes and conditions in the order they will come to pass. His foreknowledge of future things and of contingent events rests upon his decree. And that settles the question of foreknowledge; all that has come to pass. Well that raises the question then, “Is predetermination consistent with free will?” And I pointed out that if by free will one means arbitrariness then the answer is no. Pre-destination is not consistent with arbitrariness. And further if one thinks a free agent’s act must be uncertain by definition the answer again is no. Predetermination is not consistent with an uncertain human agent. The very fact that we say that a person is a completely free agent means that even God cannot know what is going to come to pass because if he is free, then God cannot know.

Now obviously since God does know what is going to come to pass, it is therefore true that there is something that God sees that enables him to know what is going to come to pass; and so man’s actions are not free in the sense that they are totally arbitrary.

I went on to say that common sense tells us that no event can be foreknown unless by some means, either physical or mental, it has been predetermined, and that the reason that God foreknows things that are going to come to pass is because he has predetermined them. If they really were free, totally free, even God could not know them.

Now you’d say “Oh, but God could,” yes, well if he could then there is something about the act that makes it certain and thus it is not a free act. I also try to point out, though we did not get much -- get into this much, that when we talk about certainty of things in the past, whether we say, “God foreknows them” or “God predetermines them.” The certainty of the action is unchanged. It is just as certain if we say, “God foreknows something is going to come to pass,” as if we say, “God predetermined it.” So if a person wants to hide behind foreknowledge and refuse predetermination, he is not in any way easing the question of certainty. It is just as certain.

Then I went on to try to overthrow any of you who may be resting in human reason and point out that complete freedom, arbitrariness or indeterminism from the philosophers’ standpoint is inconsistent with continuity of character. The wholly unpredictable man, the so called “wholly free man” would indeed be no more ethical than a tossed coin, and consequently that kind of man could not be counted upon. Man’s will does not hang in the air swinging either way by the whim of the moment. It is a secondary thing -- I pointed out -- and the actually all the actions of man’s will arise out of his inmost being and what he does, the decisions he makes are decisions that arise out of his inmost being. And it is there, where the inmost moral dispositions are, that actions originate and that the will is the response of what a man is.

And I just gave simple illustrations like, “I’m going to the basketball game on Friday night because I like basketball.” My decision is determined by what I like, so that the will is not a primary part of a man’s inmost being; it is a secondary part and it is responsive to what a man is. That means of course that we do not have free will. I went

on to point out that we do not have free will in many things such as -- we cannot determine when we were born, we cannot determine into what family we were born, we cannot determine various other things about ourselves -- which make it very evident that men do not have free will.

And finally, I suggested that what you ought to do was to study the *Scientia Media*. We did not discuss that, but I suggested you go to some of the Theologies like Berkoff’s or Hodges or Shedd’s and study what that meant and I hope some of you -- and I know you will surprise me if you did -- but I hope that some of you went and you did do a little study of the *Scientia Media*. One of these years I’m going to take just about ten people and have a good theology class and require them to study and take exams, and then I think we’re going to really learn something.

Well I didn’t intend to conclude by this with this remark because I had it in my notes, because I want you to be sure to understand some of these things that we’re talking about. What I was trying to do of course is to woo you away from Arminianism and to bring you to consistent Christianity; which is the Calvinistic approach. Arminianism is the religion of common sense, someone has said. Calvinism is the religion of St. Paul.

Now that may be a little unfair but that is very close to the truth. Today or tonight we want to pick up our study at Roman IV, in the outline, “The Relation of the Knowledge of God to the Wisdom of God.”

Now there are some, surprisingly, who say that there is no such thing as the attribute of the wisdom of God -- but in spite of what they say -- the Bible makes it abundantly clear that God does possess the attribute of wisdom. And I want to read one text tonight as the beginning of our study. It is Romans chapter 16, verse 27. The last verse of Paul’s great letter to the Church of Rome. And he in this Doxology says, “To the only wise God through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever amen.” [Repeat] “To the only wise God through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever amen.” Paul has been

talking about the message of the gospel that he proclaims, and he has spoken about how it was hidden as a mystery in ages past, but it is now been manifested by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, and has been made known to all nations for obedience of faith. And having said that, he concludes with, “To the only wise God,” that is the only God who in his wisdom has arranged this particular understanding and this particular action concerning the truth of God, “To the only wise God through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever amen.”

Now capital A: The Nature of the Wisdom of God.

Wisdom is a particular aspect of God’s knowledge. Knowledge is not the same as wisdom. The two are not the same for they do not always accompany one another. A man may have a great deal of knowledge and not a great deal of wisdom. And that is, I think, most evident in some of the common types of illustrations that we could think of. For example an uneducated man may often be superior to an educated man or a scholar in wisdom, though he may fall far behind in knowledge. Knowledge is something that we learn through the schools. Wisdom is something that we have by virtue of experience; by the application of the knowledge that we learn. Knowledge is something that we store up in our minds, in which we may possess without any real application of it, but wisdom is very practical; it is the application of knowledge to specific situations so that a man becomes wise through the application of knowledge in -- to particular situations thus out of his experience he becomes wise.

We have a saying about certain men who have a great deal of education but who manifest very little common sense. We often say about them that he or she is educated beyond his intelligence; and we know exactly what that means. Well, there are people like that who are educated far beyond their intelligence. They have been in school and they have their degrees, but they do not have the practical understanding that ought to go with it.

Now the nature of the wisdom of God then -- and I want to say three things about the wisdom of God. First, God’s wisdom is manifested in his intelligent choice of the best possible ends or goals of his actions. Now he has knowledge, he has knowledge of all things, but his wisdom is manifested in his intelligent choice of the best possible ends or goals in the things that he does. Turn with me back to Romans chapter 11 and let’s read beginning with verse 33 -- Romans chapter 11, verse 33; Paul says, “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments’ and unfathomable are his ways; for who has known the mind of the Lord or who became his counselor or who has first given to him that it might be paid back to him again; for from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the glory forever.” Notice the expression; “To him are all things.”

Now Paul has just praised God for his wisdom and his knowledge; and his wisdom is manifested in his intelligent choice of the best possible goals for his actions. And as Paul has unveiled his workings in the histories of the nations that has elicited from him this tremendous praise of the wisdom of God, and it is that to him are all things. His wisdom is manifested in his intelligent choice.

Secondly, God’s wisdom is manifested in his intelligent use of the best possible means and circumstances for his action. This is the practical use of his theoretical knowledge. For example, when Jesus Christ came in Galatians chapter 4, verse 4 and 5; Paul says that it was in the fullness of time that God sent forth his son. He waited until the best possible time. He used the best possible circumstances; the best possible means to carry out his wise actions. And so that is part of God’s wisdom too. He selects the best goals. He uses the best means. He uses the best circumstances for his actions.

And finally, God’s wisdom is manifested in his intelligent acting for the best possible reasons or judgments. So God’s wisdom then is manifested in his actions, in that he selects the best goals, he uses the best means and circumstances; and also he operates from the best possible reasons. In Ephesians chapter 1, verse 11, Paul says, “that he

works all things according to the counsel of his own will and the counsel of his own will is the standard by which he works all things.” So his wisdom then is manifested in all of these things. It is the practical application of the omniscience that God possesses in this way.

Capital B: The definition of the Wisdom of God.

If these things are true of God’s wisdom, how should we define it? I just suggest this as a definition of wisdom. Wisdom -- we are talking about the divine attribute now -- wisdom is that perfection of God by which he applies his knowledge to the attainment of the best possible goals, by the best possible means, from the best possible reasons. Let me say it again, wisdom is that perfection by which he applies his knowledge to the attainment of the best possible goals, by the best possible means, from the best possible reasons; in these senses God is only wise. I have not -- I’ve let that slip haven’t I? -- this is the application of human knowledge and wisdom to a problem, and the result is that there is failure. Well, I haven’t got time to fix it.

We’re talking about the definition of the wisdom of God here; and now I want to talk about the evidences of God’s wisdom. The wisdom of God is seen particularly in three spheres, first in the creation. Let’s turn to Psalm 104, verse 24 -- Psalm 104, verse 24. You know it is a striking thing that in the Targum, the Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis chapter 1, which reads, in our English version, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In the Targum it reads, “In the wisdom God created the heaven and the earth.” It is an expression -- of course -- of the fact that God manifested his wisdom in creation, but let’s read Psalm 104, verse 24 -- Psalm 104, verse 24, “Oh Lord how many are Thy works in wisdom; Thou hast made them all. The earth is full of Thy possessions.” The clause that I’m interested in is the second, “In wisdom Thou hast made them all.” So God’s wisdom is manifested in the creation.

Now the wisdom appears in the creation, in the creation’s variety for example. Have you ever noticed God’s creation from that standpoint? It is full of plants, it is full of

animals, it is full of birds, it is full of flowers; and not only is it full of flowers and plants and birds and animals and so on, but it is full of all kinds of varieties of each.

Now some of you know that I have a few camellias in my garden. It’s -- and this is true of only one type of flower for example -- there are at the present over three thousand varieties of the camellia, and not only that but they’re going to be more because last year I planted about twelve seeds. And camellias are known for the fact that they will have a sport, and a sport is a new kind of flower; that is a new variety. And so pretty soon you may be looking through a camellia volume and you will read the Mary McCormick Johnson Camellia and this was developed by S. Lewis Johnson Jr. It’s a most striking thing that in God’s creation there is such variety and we’re just talking about one flower, but when we think of God’s creation and the variety of it, surely it’s a manifestation of the wisdom of God. Plants, flowers, animals, birds and you of course can think of many others.

Further, it is the wisdom of God that appears in the beauty of the creation. All of the things that exist in God’s creation have their own particular beauty. Some of them don’t seem to have any beauty, but there are many, many things that have their own peculiar beauty. Not only is God’s wisdom manifested in the beauty of the creation, it is manifested in the order of the creation; day and night, months, years, the seasons, the stars, the sun, the moon; all of the features of God’s creation manifest his wisdom. His wisdom is seen in the fitness of the creation and in the things that the -- aspects of God’s creation, the things that they do. The things that earth is responsible for, the sea is responsible for, the rivers are responsible for, the trees are responsible for.

We hear a lot about what the trees do in our particular life because of the ecology crisis, and all of these things are just manifestations of the wisdom of God. Aspects of his wisdom as is seen in his creations; and this is not to mention at all the human body, the human soul, the human being as -- per say. The psalmist says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God has manifest in his creation, his wisdom in his creation; in its

variety, its beauty, its order, it’s fitness and also it’s common end. Everything works towards its particular end and goal, and that determined by God. This is one way in which the wisdom of God is manifested.

Secondly, the wisdom of God is manifested in his government of the world or his providence. Let’s turn back to Psalm 33, verses 10 and 11. Psalm 33, verses 10 and 11; “The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations. He frustrates the plans of the people. The counsel of the Lord stands forever; the plans of his heart from generation to generation.” In this text there is stated what is also stated in the New Testament, and that is that God’s plans for this universe are plans that stand forever. As Paul says in Romans chapter 8, verse 28; “He works all things together for the good of his called ones, those who love God who are the called according to his purpose.” And so we see the wisdom of God through his providence, to use another common theological term. A man who has written a wonderful book on the attributes has said, “If the explicitness of the frame conducts us to the skill of the contriver, the exactness of his order, according to his will and law, speaks no less the wisdom of the governor.”

Now this is seen in his government of man by his moral law. He has given us law. Now some people do not like law but I am very glad that God has given us law, because it is the law of God that rejoices the soul; the psalmist says. And the things that God has given to us as guides for us, they are blessings for us.

Now of course we learn from our own nature that we cannot keep these things apart from the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, but we should never forget that the things that God has given to us of the moral law are his gifts to us and we should regard them as such. Listening to them, paying attention to them, obeying them and the power of the Holy Spirit. He has also given us the Scriptures, which guide us in the past, in the present and in the future. And you know the thing about the Scriptures that is so remarkable, which God uses, is that not only do the Scriptures give us a guide for human

life; past, present and future, but they also in remarkable ways anticipate the problems of life that have arisen down through the centuries.

My wife and I were just talking as I was driving over -- a little while ago -- about the wonderful way in which God has anticipated the heresies that exist in the Christian church. For example, one of the heresies that is very common in the Christian church -- I’m speaking of it in its broadest sense -- is the heresy of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharistic sacrifice you may remember -- you may know -- that in the Roman Catholic Church it is permitted the man who comes to partake of the communion to eat of the bread, but he is forbidden to partake of the cup. That is reserved for the priest, and so the person who comes forward to receive of the bread is refused the cup.

Now the doctrine that the Roman Catholic Church has originated in order to explain that problem is the doctrine of concomitancy. Now that is, so the Romanist says, “In the bread and in the wine there is contained both the body and blood of the Lord Jesus.” And so the body and blood are contained in the bread, and the body and blood are contained in the wine. And so if you as a Roman Catholic communicant should come to the priest and say, “Sir, I notice that we are forbidden to partake of the cup which Jesus referred to, why is this so?” Why he will say, “Now you must be taught the doctrine of concomitancy; don’t you realize that when you partake of the bread you have partaken of that signifies or in which is contained both the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus, so you do not need to partake of the cup by the doctrine of concomitancy.”

Now it is striking how the Bible has anticipated that error. I don’t know whether you’ve noticed it or not but in the New Testament when our Lord instituted the Lord’s Supper, he said; concerning the cup, “Drink ye all of it.”

Now I know that many of us read that in the Authorized Version as if it means to down everything that is in the little cup. In fact, I must confess for many, many years that is the way I understood it. When I grew up in the Presbyterian church and we had the

communion service once every quarter, the minister -- I can still remember repeating this -- “Drink ye all of it,” and I thought he was referring to the fact that we were to drink all of it. And so I can remember feeling a little trepidation about the fact that I must be sure to drink everything in it because Jesus said to drink all of it. And so I would take the cup, and I can remember holding it up to be sure that I drank all of it. And then when I began to read the Greek of the New Testament I discovered that the, “ye all,” was of course a reference to all individuals, that is that, “they all.” It really should be rendered like this; “Drink you all of it,” and of course any southerner would appreciate that kind of rendering; and so what it means of course, is that all are to partake of it.

Now isn’t that a striking thing; here in the words of institution of our Lord he has said that which directly contradicts the Roman Catholic’s prevention of the laity from partaking of the cup. He says -- they say, “You are not allowed to drink of the cup,” he says, “You all drink of it, every one of you.”

Now what is so interesting about this, that if you remember in connection with the bread he does not say, “Eat ye all of it.” Now isn’t that striking? In other words the little word “all” is used only in connection with the cup. As if long centuries before he anticipated that there would arise a religious organization that would forbid the common Christian from partaking of the cup -- not the common bread -- but the cup, and he’s anticipated it by using the “all” with the cup. So drink you all of the cup. As if to say, “I know there’s going to be that error of the Roman Catholic Church concomitancy and so notice my words.”

The Bible, you see, is full of the wisdom of God and not only does it tell us how we should live, not only does it regulate our past, our present and our future, but it even guards us against error. I think also it anticipated the error that the Roman Catholic Church has in connection with Mary. It anticipated a great deal of the Mariolatry that exists today. Isn’t it striking, for example, that in the description of Mary in Luke chapter 1, in her relationship to Elizabeth, it is not Mary’s holiness that extols; it is Elizabeth’s

holiness that is extolled. It is said of Elizabeth, that she was righteous, walking in all the commandments of God; blameless. It does not say anything about Mary’s holiness, as if to warn of against giving to Mary any virtues that she was not intended to have.

And furthermore, you may remember that it is Mary who is singled out in the language of the New Testament for some statements -- at least to modern ears -- sound very harsh; because remember it is at the marriage in Cana of Galilee that Jesus says with reference to Mary, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”

Now I know that does not really sound in the original -- in the original circumstances the way that it does to us. But its still is a very firm and direct word. The kind of word that is not given to anyone else; “Woman, behold thy son, behold thy mother.” Our Lord is not speaking disrespectfully but he is speaking plainly and he is speaking clearly; and if it is in any way a slight -- which I don’t think that it is intended to be -- it is purely because in the years to come there would be those who would give Mary an unscriptural place in the Christian church. For the Roman Catholic Church of course says that Mary was preserved from sin, whereas she says that she was a sinner because she speaks of God who has redeemed her.

Now -- I think also -- it’s very interesting that the only two people in the New Testament that our Lord speaks this strong way to are Mary and -- guess who -- Peter. The so-called “first hope.” It’s as if again, you see, he has -- the word of God has -- anticipated the exaggerations that would arise down through the centuries. So God’s wisdom is seen in his creation; it is seen in his government of the world or his providence by virtue of his moral law, by the Scriptures and other things. His wisdom also appears in the government of sinful men because he overrules and even uses evil. The psalmist says in Psalm 76, verse 10 that, “The wrath of man shall praise Thee.” So God makes the wrath of men to praise him and even the sinful actions of men are used by the wise God to his glory.

Now it is, of course, wisdom, to use the innocent world to the glory of God, but it is even more wisdom to be able to use the rebellious, disobedient men and angelic beings for the glory of God; and that God is able to do. Charnock has said, "To chain up Satan wholly and to frustrate his whiles would be an argument of divine goodness, but to suffer him to run his risk and then improve all his contrivances for his own glorious and gracious ends and purposes manifests, besides his power and goodness, his wisdom also." And so God out of the experiences of sinners manifests his wisdom. He manifests his wisdom, for example, in allowing the angels that sinned with Satan to fall, because if you'll remember Satan or Lucifer was the head of the Angelic Host.

Well, when the head of the Angelic Host fell, he fell from his position; the one who has come to take his place is our Lord Jesus Christ himself and so the one who has assumed headship is the Son of God. And I think it's striking how God has in -- even in the fall of the angels -- manifested his wisdom. It is manifest in the experience of Joseph, and when Joseph was sold into slavery, that was sin on the part of Israel, but it was by means of this that God not only preserved Israel, but Egypt as well, as the story in Genesis makes plain.

When Tamar and Judah committed their terrible sin of lust, they never dreamed for one moment that out of that unlawful union God was going to bring the Redeemer of the world, for Jesus Christ arose according to the flesh from that line. Jonah's sin was a sin that was overruled for the glory of God. Jonah probably never realized until after it had all taken place that the occasion that his sin and the occasion of the experience in the Mediterranean Sea, was probably the means by which God spoke to the Ninevites, for when they saw Jonah as a person who had, had this tremendous experience through this great fish, the worshippers of fish gods were naturally impressed. And through the experience of Jonah's sin with its result in punishment; God was able to speak in a wonderful way to the Ninevites. That is the manifestation of the wisdom of God.

It is manifest -- God’s wisdom is manifested in many other ways too. We’ll have to go on. It is manifested of course, perhaps greatest of all, in the redemption of sinners. And I want you to turn with me to a couple of passages in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, first of all, and then chapter 2. 1 Corinthians chapter 1; let’s read beginning with verse 18 -- 1 Corinthians chapter 1,

“For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing, foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God, for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside, where is the wise man, where is the scribe, where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world, for sense in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God? God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believed, for indeed Jews asked for signs and Greeks searched for wisdom and we preached Christ crucified; to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (In chapter 2, verse 7) “But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery; the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory.”

God’s wisdom in creation amazes the eye. His wisdom in providence astonishes the mind. But his wisdom in redemption awes us and it leaves us lost in wonder, love in praise. It is centered in Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God.

Although hidden from the natural man, it is the manifestation of the manifold wisdom of God. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 3, “It encompasses glory of God, the salvation of man, the overthrow of Satan and his angels, the blotting out of sin, the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon the earth and the eternal state, and most of all it is seen in the solving of the problem of the justice and mercy of God. His justice in

punishing sin, and his mercy in pardoning.” It is in this -- I think -- of all the things that God does, that one sees his wisdom. For you see the greatest problem that ever faced this universe was the problem of the reconciliation of the justice of God with the mercy of God, because the problem that faced God was, “what can I do for men who have broken my law, since I’m righteous shall I not punish and on the other hand since I am merciful shall I not exercise mercy, but how can I exercise mercy in pardoning when my justice demands, because of the broken law, that they be punished with eternal death?”

And that is the problem, which God solved in the cross of Jesus Christ. It is just as if for a moment we were to have the pleading of the justice, and the mercy and the wisdom of God. For just a moment imagine that you are in the presence of justice, and justice is expressing what must be done because of his character, and as he speaks about man; he speaks of man as a rebel. He says to God, “God, man is a rebel, he has broken your law.” He’s not a rebel by necessity, but Adam, the only human being who ever had free will, had free will and of his own free will he sinned. And out of the fall of Adam, the human race has been plunged into sin. They have manifested their sin in their constant apostasy and in their constant iniquity down through the years.

What excuse can man have? “God you have a law which says that the wages of sin is death, how can you in honesty and in injustice to your own principles, how can you possibly allow man to escape the judgment of God. Either man must suffer or your holy law must be expunged and be forever out of date. Not to punish is to approve the devil’s lie and to justify the creatures’ revolt. It would be a condemnation of your own law as unrighteous and a sentencing of your own wisdom as imprudent; better man should forever suffer the punishment of his offense than God bare the dishonor of his attributes; better that man should be miserable than God should be unrighteous, unwise, false and tamely bare the denial of his sovereignty, justice might say.”

And then mercy might want to enter a plea, and mercy would come and mercy would say something like this, “Well it was not a pure act of his own as the devil’s revolt

was, because he had tempter and the devil had none. He had knowledge and understanding to know Thy will and a power to obey it, yet he was mutable and had a capacity to fall and he fell. Did you create the world to suffer an eternal dishonor in letting yourself be outwitted by Satan and your own work wrested out of your hands? Shall the work of eternal counsel presently sink into irreparable destruction and the honor of an Almighty and his wise work be lost in the ruin of the creature?” and so on. And mercy might plead because mercy would know of course that that is an aspect of God’s nature. And so mercy and justice have pled and justice pleads because of the broken law that man be punished and mercy pleads because of the grace of God that man be forgiven.

And now finally a third of God’s attributes speaks. It is God’s wisdom, and God’s wisdom speaks along this line, “I will satisfy your pleas, I will satisfy the plea of justice and I will satisfy the plea of mercy and grace, and I shall do this by virtue of a plan whereby the second person of the Trinity; the wisdom of God comes. And the wisdom of God shall come and take upon him the judgment of the broken law and on the cross at Calvary God shall meet out upon him all the judgment of that broken law, and God’s law shall be established as his law. A law that cannot be broken except punishment follow.”

And so the Son of God on the cross at Calvary came and there he, under the judgment of God’s law, bore that judgment and punishment to its full. And as a result of that when he cried out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” He had taken upon himself all that the broken law demanded; and finally as the Scripture said, “He said, it is finished.” Looking at it from the standpoint of the mercy of God and the love of God, it was the love of God that devised this plan, it was in his wisdom, that he out of love for man gave the Son and so out of his mercy, out of his grace, out of his love, it is he who devised the plan, gave the Son in manifestation of his love.

Now he did not die in order that God might love men, he died because God loved men. He was not sent in order that God might love men, but he came because God

loved sinners. And so he came out of the love of God, and as a result of justice being satisfied in the death of Jesus Christ, mercy is now free to offer eternal life to those who acknowledge that they are sinners, and who in the humility of acknowledging that they are such and are nothing before God, receive as a gift the forgiveness of sins that mercy had pled for. And so in the wisdom of God, the justice of God is satisfied in the suffering of the Savior; the love of God is satisfied in that provision. And so righteousness and peace kiss one another in the wisdom of the provision of the Son of God. Now I want you to know that is a tremendous activity on the part of God and in it there is the fullest expression of the wisdom of God.

Now his wisdom appears further and if we were to begin to discuss these things, it would take us all the rest of 1972 and on into the ages of eternity, because his wisdom not only appears in the things that I’ve been talking about but it appears in the felicity of the Son doing the work; not the Father or the Spirit. It appears in the wisdom of the foundation of the two natures of the Son by which he is able to accomplish this great thing. The union of the two natures in Jesus Christ itself is an incomprehensible thing, but it is an incomprehensibly wonderful thing. But God’s wisdom is seen in the manifestation of these two contrary affections at one time. The greatest hatred of sin is seen in the suffering of the Savior, and the greatest love to the sinner in the gift of the Savior. His wisdom is seen in giving us the surest ground of comfort and the strongest incentive to obedience, for the incentive to obedience is not the obligation that we have to keep the law, but it is the gratitude that arises to the knowledge that God in his electing love has singled out me and has saved me.

And in that tremendous fact there is all the motivation for Christian living and it is God who in his wisdom has given it to us. There’s only two kinds of religion in the world. There is the religion of free will and that is Pelagian and false. It is the religion of works. And then there is the religion of the electing love of God, and that is the biblical truth. And when we come to recognize that, then we shall come to recognize what it is

to know Jesus Christ as our Savior and what it is to know the tremendous motivation of the love of God for me. His wisdom is manifested in the term of salvation which is faith because it is suited to man's fallen state, he can do nothing, and it is also suited to God because it is the one way by which God is completely glorified for when we receive his salvation as a gift; we acknowledge we have nothing with which to commend ourselves to God and therefore we give him all of the glory. The whole of the program in all of its minutest details is an expression of the wisdom of God, which is the application of his knowledge to our specific needs; that's true wisdom.

Now as wisdom is always seen in the plan of the ages. Romans chapter 9, chapter 10 and chapter 11 express this about as well as any section of the New Testament, and Paul in these chapters talks about how God has worked in the Old Testament and how he has manifested his electing love in the selection of Abraham and then Isaac and then Jacob. He has said -- remember that in connection with Isaac is that in Isaac -- that Thy seed is called not all the sons of Abraham inherit then he has said it's not all the sons of Isaac that inherit but in Jacob is Thy seed and so Paul moves down through the Old Testament giving the history of God's plan pointing out that it is those who are the objects of election that are within the program of God.

And then in the eleventh chapter he answers the question, “Well what about Israel then?” And he says that Israel's salvation is something to be expected in the future, that Israel's fall is not total and it's not final, that all Israel shall be saved. And when he finishes with his discussion of how the Gentiles and the Jews have been in their relationships to one another a manifestation of the plan of God. He has said in verse 33, “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.” He has talked about how we are saved by faith alone, how we are saved by grace alone and how it all ultimately issues to the glory of God alone.

Did you know -- I happen to be as you have already guessed -- a person who believes very strongly in what is called Reformed theology, and so I think a great deal of

sola fides, by faith alone; *sola gratia*, by grace alone; and *sola de gloria*, to God alone be the glory. And so in a sense that’s the way Romans 11 winds up. It’s the *sola fides*, and the *sola gratia*, lead on to the water and brought us, *sola de gloria*; to God alone be the glory. And any kind of preaching, any kind of teaching that does not give alone the glory can hardly be biblical teaching. Gifford, in his commentary on Romans at this point says, “Rivers return to the place whence they came as grace issues in his glory.” And if we do not see it now we shall see it in the future. When we look at the way God has worked in the history of the nations down through the years, we shall ascribe glory to him and say from him and through him and to him are all things.

Now capital D: The Goal of the Wisdom of God.

Shedd in his theology says, “The happiness of the creature cannot be the final end of God’s action. There would be no wisdom in this case because the superior would be subordinated to the inferior; that would be folly not wisdom. The end would be made the means and the means the end. The infinite would exist for the finite. Furthermore happiness cannot be an ultimate end because to seek it, is to fail to get it. For he that finds his life shall lose it.” Happiness -- my dear Christian friend is an effect -- holiness is the cause. That’s why we should never say to people as an incentive to the gospel if we are expressing a true and ultimate incentive, “Be happy and believe in Jesus Christ.” Isn’t it interesting that the Bible never says, “Be ye happy.”

Now it says such things as, “Oh the happinesses of certain people.” Now these are results that flow out of certain spiritual experiences and positions. But to tell a person to be happy is not to give him the ultimate goal or end. Consequently any invitations like have a happy and meaningful life believe on Jesus Christ fall short of the biblical ideal.

Now I’m not suggesting that a person should not be happy, but what I am suggesting is that, that is not the ultimate goal and ideal of the Christian life. The ultimate ideal and goal is holiness, and holiness leads to the glory of God. So from the human standpoint the Bible says, “Be ye holy.” From the divine standpoint it says holiness is that

which brings glory to God. So it seems to me that a Christian’s one aim is not to be happy. A Christian’s aim is to be holy, holy.

Now holiness means separation to God. That is he is to have one hundred percent of our lives. So far as I can tell that never happens as long as we’re in the flesh. To exalt people to be wholly the Lord’s is a true exaltation, but to expect it to transpire as long as we’re in the flesh is a vain expectation. But that is our standard, “Be ye holy as I am holy,” not happy.

Finally, just a few words on the practical application of the attributes. I have listed these separately but I’m just going to run down briefly through them due to lack of time. The attribute of knowledge; what does this mean to us practically? Well, it means something to us in instruction, omniscience implies providence, certainty in the Day of Judgment, ability to resurrect the body; it is a tremendous encouragement to prayer. A person does not wish to pray to someone who does not know everything. He wants to pray to someone who knows everything and so he prays to God. He does not pray to men. Have you ever noticed that in the Old Testament, Israel never prayed to Abraham although Abraham was the head of the covenant?

For thousands of years no human being ever prayed to a man. Suddenly the New Testament times come and a church called the church of Jesus Christ begins to talk about praying to men, and so today we have men who pray to men. Men who even pray to women, but in the New Testament we have nothing like that. We do not have anybody praying to St. Peter, to St. Paul, much less to St. Roche, St. Swithen, St. Martin, St. Francis, and all the rest of them. We pray to God because we want to pray to someone who is omniscient. This is of tremendous practical application to us in comfort. Since he knows everything, he knows all of our adversaries; he knows all of his promises.

Now we do not have to worry about some tale barer informing on us. No enemy can make an accusation stick against us, which is not true. No forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to bash us and expose our past. There can be

before God nothing like that what has happened recently in Dallas in connection with the president of the Kern Commission, who after all these years we learn is James Kell Zulinger. Now a skeleton came tumbling out of his closet. He was exposed apparently.

Now we do not have any possibility of such a thing with God. He knows everything about us. There is no unsuspected weakness in our character that he does not know about. This doctrine is of significance for us in admonition and in exhortation. It leads to watchful sincerity. If God really has the attribute of knowledge then the words that were spoken to Solomon surely are words that apply to us. “And thou Solomon my son serve the Lord Thy God of Thy fathers and serve him with a perfect heart for the Lord understands all the imaginations and the thoughts.”

And in connection with wisdom we can see the immutability of his decree and -- I am instructed by this -- because he’s not like Tom Landry. You know Tom Landry goes into a big game and he has a game plan. And if everything goes right the game plan is adhered to, but if something happens early in the game, they scrap the game plan and go to another game plan and may even go to some other game plan later on. Well God needs no other alternate game plan, so he is not going to lay aside his wise resolves and consequently that means that in everything that he does his decrees are immutable, he never changes them. And oh the fitness of trusting someone who doesn’t have to change his mind, try a new idea. Tremendous admonitory significance in this.

Think of introducing new ideas in God’s local church when the word of God has given us the wisdom of God for the local church. Think of introducing new ideas in the church of God universal, when God has given us the word from an omniscient God and from a wise God; the only wise God. Think of introducing new ideas, what that means. Think of the a front to God of introducing a new morality, of saying for example, “Now we must abandon the statements of the word of God and we must substitute for them; lies, murder, thievery -- as the situation may demand in the exercise of love.” Think of what that means when we realize that God is an all-knowing God and an all-wise God.

Think of what that means. A simple knowledge of the attributes of God would tell us that that is Satanic teaching.

Did you know it’s a tremendously comforting thing too, to know that our God is only wise, he’s like a wise Physician, sometimes he prescribes things that we don’t like, they’re very bitter. Sometimes it’s necessary to operate. Sometimes it’s necessary to take very unpleasant medicine, but if we know that our physician is all-wise then it makes an entirely different matter out of it, doesn’t it? And so the things that God brings into our lives come from an all knowing and an all-wise God. So with Paul, “To the only wise God, to the only wise God be glory forever and ever through Jesus Christ, amen.” Let’s bow our heads in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for such a God. How little are our conceptions of Thee. Deliver us Lord from human reasoning, human wisdom, human knowledge and enable us to rest upon divine knowledge, divine wisdom.

For Thy glory, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.