

“His Ways Past Finding Out”  
Ecclesiastes 8:16-17  
(Preached at Trinity, November 5, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The Book of Ecclesiastes is the fruit of Solomon's quest to discover the meaning of life. He concluded that it was a grievous task with no clear answers.  
**Ecclesiastes 1:13 NAU** - "And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. *It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.*"
2. The more he searched for the meaning of life the more he had to conclude that man cannot know that which only God can know. The ultimate conclusion is that a man should live his life under the watchful eye of God and trust Him in the life He has given.  
**Ecclesiastes 8:15 NAU** - "So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils *throughout* the days of his life which God has given him under the sun."
3. But Solomon was never content to rest without knowing more. Back in **Chapter 3** he told us that everything has its time.  
**Ecclesiastes 3:1 NAU** - "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--"  
There are constant seasons of change, and there is an unseen hand that controls every season and every event.  
**Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 NAU** - "I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. <sup>11</sup> He has made everything appropriate in its time."
4. Now as we come to the end of **Chapter 8** Solomon concludes, yes God governs all things, but God's ways cannot be known. We cannot know whether good things or bad will happen to us. We can spend restless days and sleepless nights pondering the question and still not arrive at an answer.  
**Ecclesiastes 8:17 NAU** - "though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover."
5. No amount of human wisdom can enter the mind of God. God is beyond our understanding.  
What awaits you in the future? Will it be sickness or health? Will it be wealth or poverty? Will it be freedom or bondage? Joy or sorrow?  
And by wisdom man comes completely short in judging God's actions. Our foolishness is often exposed on the trailing side of hurricanes or wildfires or tornados as we hear pastors declaring that it is the judgment of God. They expose their foolishness.  
And as we observe the conditions of life around us, are they indicators of God's love or hate—are they reward or punishment?

**Ecclesiastes 9:1 NAU** - "For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether *it will be* love or hatred; anything awaits him."

6. God's ways are unfathomable.

As the KJV states it in **Romans 11**, they are past finding out.

**Romans 11:33 KJV** - "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

7. William Cowper wrote:

1 God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
and rides upon the storm.

2 Deep in unfathomable mines  
of never-failing skill;  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
and works His sov'reign will.

4 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
but trust Him for His grace;  
behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

8. How can we know the mind of God?

a. On one hand it is impossible to know God's ways.

**Romans 11:33 KJV** – "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

**Isaiah 55:8-9 KJV** – "For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

b. We can't enter into the sovereign mind of God. His exercises of sovereign dominion are not revealed to us. They are called secret things.

**Deuteronomy 29:29** – "The secret things belong to the LORD our God"

c. But God has given us His revelation – His revealed will, His Word.

**Deuteronomy 29:29 NAU** - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."

d. Our prayer is for God to teach us by His Word. That the Holy Spirit would illuminate our minds giving us spiritual understanding.

**Psalms 86:11 KJV** – "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."

**Psalms 119:9-12 KJV** – "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word. <sup>10</sup> With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. <sup>11</sup> Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. <sup>12</sup> Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes."

9. We need to acknowledge our ignorance. God hasn't been pleased to reveal all of His ways to us. But He has given us His Word. As we seek to understand life we need to frame it within the context of God's Word. You cannot function in your Divine calling, no matter what it is, without God's instruction by His Word. We need God to teach us how to be single, how to be married, how to be Godly parents, obedient children, how to be a good student, a faithful employee, a Godly employer. "Oh God, walk with me continually and teach me by Thy Word."
10. This passage affirms some important truths as we consider the mind of God. Paul asked the question, "For who has known the mind of the Lord" The answer points us to the necessity of God's regenerating grace. No one can understand what God is doing until God unites us with Christ.  
**1 Corinthians 2:16 NAU** - "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ."
- I. First of all, the lost man is completely unable to comprehend the mind of God.
- A. To know the mind of God is to enter into union with Him
1. The mind of God is impossible to understand for the lost man.
  2. Because of sin the mind of the lost man has been given over to foolishness  
**Romans 1:21-22 NAU** - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,"
    - a. We were never meant to be independent from God. We were created in fellowship with God to benefit from His wisdom.
    - b. We were created with a proper view of God's Law – we obeyed Him.
    - c. Sin brought a knowledge of good and evil – a sinful moral autonomy governed by a corrupted conscience unable to rightly discern right and wrong.  
 Lost people are no longer able to think God's thoughts.
  3. Divine light has shined upon fallen men but they are unable to comprehend it  
**John 1:4-5 NAU** - "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. <sup>5</sup> The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."
- B. The mind of God is impossible to understand for the worldly wise.
1. The lost man can see what God is doing but he cannot comprehend why God is doing it.  
**Ecclesiastes 8:17 NAU** - "and I saw every work of God, / *concluded* that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover."

2. The Bible continually describes this ignorance as blindness. It is both a willful blinding and a judicial blinding.  
**Isaiah 29:9-10 NAU** - "Be delayed and wait, Blind yourselves and be blind; They become drunk, but not with wine, They stagger, but not with strong drink. <sup>10</sup> For the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, the seers."
  - a. In other words the lost man has chosen to be blind through his willful sin and rebellion.
  - b. At the same time, God has given him over to his blindness  
 Isaiah paints the picture of a drunken man stumbling in his stupor  
 God has shut their eyes.
3. Because of this ignorance of God the lost man continually kicks against God's providential rule.
  - a. The problem with humanity is our depraved ignorance. We believe we are so wise and intelligent when in reality we are but fools.
  - b. He hates God dominion in his life. He can't conceive of the glory of living in the light of God's countenance.
  - c. He lives as if God does not exist  
**Psalm 14:1** – "The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*"
  - d. In his blindness he is often religious but despises the demands of Christianity – the narrow way. He follows his own way.  
**Proverbs 12:15** – "The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes"

## II. What about the believer? Can we know the mind of God?

Solomon struggled with this.

**Ecclesiastes 8:17 NAU** - "I saw every work of God, *I concluded* that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover."

A. God has revealed His mind unto His people.

**1 Corinthians 2:16-3:1 NAU** - "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. "

1. This is the great wonder – that which is unfathomable and beyond comprehension is delivered unto us. God has shared His mind with us.
2. In Ephesians Paul describes it as "The mystery of His will."  
**Ephesians 1:7-9 NAU** - "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him"
3. In other words, God has revealed to us His secrets  
**Psalm 25:14 NAU** - "The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant."

- a. This doesn't mean we know what the temperature will be next week. It doesn't mean we can know what our life will be like next year.
  - b. But God has shared with us His redemptive purpose in His Word. We know what He is doing in the world.
- B. This is work of God in the lives of the redeemed.
- 1. The Holy Spirit serves as the illuminating Spirit He teaches us. He reveals the truth of God's Word.  
**John 14:26 NAU** – "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."
  - 2. Jesus in His office of Prophet teaches us the will of God.  
**1 Corinthians 1:30 NAU** - "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,"
  - 3. Our minds are illuminated so that we view God properly
    - a. We are granted the ability to know Him properly  
To see His holiness, His goodness –
    - b. To properly reverence Him.  
"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"
  - 4. Our minds are illuminated so that we view ourselves properly
    - a. The lost man thinks too highly of himself.
    - b. God's wisdom brings us to see ourselves as we are.  
Our wretched sin, our hopeless guilt.  
Our smallness before God.
  - 5. We are granted the wisdom to trust Him.  
We don't know the details of what God is doing, but we trust His ways are perfect.
  - 6. We are granted the wisdom to see the world differently.
    - a. God grants us wisdom to see life from the right perspective  
Without Christ life is vanity, empty, useless.  
In Solomon's investigation of life he saw the futility of life without God.
    - b. We are able to see with eternal eyes – we see beyond this life.
    - c. Material things no longer have the same enticement
  - 7. God gives us spiritual understanding - to think differently – to see things differently, to love spiritual things, to speak spiritual things
- C. Although God has taught us His will and His ways the infinite dimensions of His mind are still unfathomable – God is infinite in His being.
- 1. We are finite. God is infinite.
  - 2. There are mysteries of His providence that we will never know  
We must stay continually upon our knees seeking God's way for our life.
  - 3. When we pray we pray with the knowledge that He knows all things and rules all things. He has designed all things. Instead of restless days and sleepless nights worrying about the future, we need to rest in His goodness.

Conclusion:

1. We need to trust in the wisdom of God  
**Proverbs 3:5-7** – “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.”
2. For the Christian life is an exciting journey into the unfathomable. The knowledge of His love for us is unfathomable. The knowledge of God’s mind is unfathomable. This is why reading God’s Word is rich above measure. This is why life is an adventure as God is continuing to teach more and more of His ways.