

# The Wisdom of God

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We come to third stool of trusting God and that is trusting in God's wisdom and for that would you turn with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter 11.

Paul has been writing about God's dealings with the Jews and with the Gentiles and he concludes this beginning verse 33 of Romans 11 with this sort of doxology.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen from Matthew chapter 10 and Luke chapter 12 both the sovereignty of God in our affairs and the fact that he is good. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. And so the question would arise: If this is true, if God is both sovereign and good, if he loves us and if he has the power to control all of our circumstances and he does, in fact, control all of our circumstances, then why do we experience so much difficulty and so much pain in life?

Well, first of all in answering that, in the big picture all of the difficulty and pain in life are the result of the curse that came as a result of Adam's sin in the garden. God cursed the ground. God cursed nature. And then, of course, Adam and Eve had... When they lost the presence and the intimacy of God they had the sinful nature, this propensity to sin. And every difficulty, every pain in our lives as a result either of God's curse on creation or the sin that is residing in each of our hearts. And so the big picture—why is there so much pain—it all goes back to the Garden of Eden.

On an individual level and on a specific occasion we ask why a particular difficulty, why a particular heartache? And we have to say that usually we do not know.

Now sometimes we can see what God is doing in our lives. I know a situation I referred to last night where the criticism of a couple of friends and I realized that God was dealing with pride in my life that I thought had been dealt with. And so there are times when we can see, "Oh, yes, God is doing this through this particular difficulty in my life."

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 11:33-36

But so often times we cannot see that. We may see it later on. We may be able to look back and say, “Oh, yes, I can see something now.” But God has not asked us to see the purpose. He is just asking us to trust him.

And the text here in Romans 11:33, particular tells us that God’s ways, he says, “How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”<sup>2</sup> That is to say we cannot follow and track out what God is doing in our lives because his ways are unsearchable and inscrutable.

But one thing we can be confident of, one thing we can grab hold of and say, “This is true regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the fact that I cannot see what God is doing,” one thing God does nothing or allows nothing without a purpose. There is no such thing as random events in God’s universe. Everything that occurs in God’s universe has a purpose and it fits into God’s ultimate plan. And every thing, every event, every circumstance that affects you fits into God’s plan and purpose for you.

You can be sure of this. If you are a child of God, for a child of God there is no such thing as pain without a purpose. All pain in your life has an ultimate purpose. Now, overall, as we saw last night, that purpose is to conform us to the likeness of Christ. But along the way God has individual purposes. He wants to deal with pride in our life. He wants to deal with this sin in our lives and so forth and so God brings or allows these circumstances to come into our lives, but there is no such thing as pain without a purpose.

And part of the pain is that so often times we cannot discern what the purpose is. And so Romans... As we go back to Romans 11:33 and we say God’s judgments are unsearchable and his ways are inscrutable. We simply cannot track what God is doing.

We come to the place where we have to say. “God, I do not know what you are doing. I do not understand what you are doing, but I know that you know and I trust you. I trust your sovereignty and your life and your wisdom in this.

In verse 34 Paul is quoting from Isaiah 40 when he says, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”<sup>3</sup>

Now if you were to go back and read that verse in its context in Isaiah chapter 40 the prophet there is talking about creation and he is talking about the immensity of God in reference to his creation. He talks about holding the waters of the earth in the palm of his hand. And when you think about that two thirds of the earth’s surface is covered with water... And, of course, again, that is a metaphorical expression. God doesn’t have hands. But he is saying that God is so great that he, as it were, holds the waters of the earth in the palm of his hand. He says he marks off the heavens with a span,<sup>4</sup> which is the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger as the hand is spread out like this. And he

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 11:33

<sup>3</sup> Romans 11:34

<sup>4</sup> See Isaiah 40:12

says he marks off the heavens with the span of his hand. In other words, God is so great that, you know, you think about the greatest things, the volume of the water, the distance across the universe and so forth. And he is saying that God is so great that all of this is simply trivial in the eyes of God.

And we look at the universe, 100 billion galaxies and 100 billion stars and the distance across even our galaxy is an unimaginable distance. And God says, “That is just a detail to me. I just measure that with the breadth of my hand.”

And so Paul is quoting, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”<sup>5</sup>

Let me read to you something from a book titled, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* written by an Australian physician and microbiologist by the name of Michael Denton. It is a book that is devastating in its critique of the Darwinian theory of evolution. And he makes a very strong case for the fact that it cannot be possible.

But in the midst of that book he talks about the human cell. Now the scientists tell us that there is somewhere between 75 and 100 trillion cells in your body—that is not million. That’s not even billion. That’s trillion—somewhere between 75 and 100 trillion cells in your body. And with the electronic microscopes that the scientists have today, they can look at these cells.

And Michael Denton says, if you could, you know, blow up a cell to where it was like a giant spaceship sitting above New York City or London or some large city like that, he said, “What you would see would be this immense factory.” And he says that inside each one of these—tiny is a very inadequate word. I mean tiny, the word tiny is large when you are speaking of a cell. I mean we are talking about... You just think of your body and at the minimum there is 75 trillion of these cells in your body and he says that every one of these cells is like an automated digital factory that has robotics and it has fail safe mechanisms and it has quality control mechanisms, all of these things.

And he says that if you could blow up the cell you would see these portholes with goods going in and out of the cell continuously. He says it is like a giant automated factory that has as many distinct manufacturing processes as all of the manufacturing capabilities in the modern world. You take all of the various kinds of factories that produce this, that and the other from computers to bulldozers and everything in between, all the very distinct types of manufactured products to be manufactured and he said that the human cell has that many distinct capabilities.

And then he says that the human cell has one capability that no machine or factory in our modern age can duplicate and that is that that cell can replicate itself in just a few hours.

We look at that and we say, “Isn’t God smart?” I mean that God could design that.

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 11:34

Now, I have a degree in engineering and I worked in engineering between my short stint in the navy and then going on the Navigator's staff. I worked in the aircraft industry for a couple of years and I learned a lot of things about engineering design and one of them is trial and error. You know, it just takes a lot of trial and error. Nobody ever gets it right the first time.

Now God didn't have to sit down at a drafting board of a computer and design the human cell. God just spoke it into existence. God just said, "Let there be..." And that intricate cell which is so complicated, so complete and so forth, it is a marvel. It is a marvel of scientific and engineering ingenuity. And we look at that and we say, "Isn't God smart?"

And in the context of this—now let's just, let's pretend a moment. Do you think there is anybody living in this world today, take the most brilliant scientist there is and could that most brilliant scientist have been a consultant to God in the design of the human cell? Well, to ask the question is to answer it. It is not, it is ridiculous.

And this is what Isaiah and Paul quoting him is saying. "Who has ever been God's counselor?"<sup>6</sup>

Now today in the business world businesses go out and they hire consultants. They are people who have become specialists in certain things, computer specialists or human resources specialists and so forth and they go into a consulting business. And so here, say, a company that is manufacturing something and they have a particular need in an area so they engage a consultant to come in.

Can you think of anybody whom God would have wanted to engage as a consultant in designing the human cell? Can you think of anybody that God would have consulted in designing the plan of redemption?

This is what Paul is getting at.

And so we look at the wisdom of God in creation and we look at, you know, we can go from the extremely—and, as I say, the word tiny does not do justice to it. It is infinitely smaller than tiny. But we look at the cell and then we look at the universe and we go from the micro to the macro and we know that in the universe that there is simply no margin of error. There is none. There is no margin of error in the construction, in the constitution of the universe. It has to be exactly the way it is in order to support life just on this planet. God didn't design the universe by trial and error. I can assure you that.

And we look at that and we marvel in God's wisdom. But then we turn to God's providence and I described providence for you last night as God's invisible hand, God's orchestrating all events for his glory and our good. We look at God's providence and we want to be his counselor. We want to tell God how he should work. We want to tell God how things should work out in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones.

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<sup>6</sup> See Romans 11:34

You know we find ourselves... We don't verbalize this, but we find ourselves in the very core of our being saying, "God, you know, I would do this differently. I wouldn't allow my daughter to get cancer," these kinds of things.

We want to be God's counselor.

We can look at the universe and we can see... We can look at all of the creation and we can see God's wisdom. But then we look at how God is running his universe today and particularly running our own individual lives and the lives of those we love and we want to question what God is doing.

But God says in Isaiah 55 verse nine, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."<sup>7</sup>

Now today when we send, you know, rockets to Mars and so forth the term higher than the heavens may not be so meaningful, but in those days that was an ultimate distance and still is. Whatever metaphor we want to use today God is saying that his ways and his thoughts are infinitely higher than our ways and our thoughts. We simply cannot track, we simply cannot understand, apart from God's revealing to us, we cannot understand what he is doing and why he is doing it.

Let me give you two illustrations from the Scripture. Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 24—and this is on the first Easter Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection—and beginning with verse 13.

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"<sup>8</sup>

And Jesus, of course, is playing along with them.

And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 55:9

<sup>8</sup> Luke 25:13-18

<sup>9</sup> Luke 25:19-21

They had hoped, they had expected that he was the one who would redeem Israel, but they had a certain plan in mind that they thought God would accomplish. And instead of Jesus being the mighty conqueror who frees them from the Roman Empire, these kinds of things, he ends up getting crucified on a Roman cross.

And they said, “But we had hoped...”<sup>10</sup> Notice here past tense. “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”<sup>11</sup>

But the fact is that is exactly what Jesus had done. That is what he did on the cross. He redeemed, not from the heel of the Roman Empire, but he redeemed people from their sins. Then he redeemed people from the curse of God.

But, you see, because they thought God should act in a certain way, God was going to do this and instead God does this and their hopes were dashed. God’s ways are higher than our ways.

Now the prophets prophesied that this was going to happen. You read Isaiah 53 and, you know, there is the gospel. There is the crucifixion. It is all right there in Isaiah 53, but they missed it because they were not thinking the thoughts that God was thinking.

And so their hopes have been dashed. But God had been doing exactly and God had done exactly the thing that they had hoped he would do.

Now we kind of smile and we like this story because it has a happy ending. You know, they understand who Jesus is and in due course of time they begin to understand why Jesus died on the cross and the resurrection and these things and this has a happy ending. And so we like this story and we kind of put ourselves in the position of these two disciples and we said, “Ok, Lord, I missed it, but know I know better.”

But now let’s turn in our Bibles to Acts 24. It is interesting that Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke and Acts and both of these occasions are in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter, first of Luke and then of Acts.

The very last verse. And the context of Luke 24, the setting of Luke 24 is Paul, you remember had been sort of grabbed in the temple in Jerusalem and had been falsely accused of bringing Titus into the temple area and defiling the temple and so the Jews were about to kill him and he is rescued by the Roman soldiers and eventually ends up in Caesarea and he is there and nothing is happening.

And now with that in mind in Acts 24:27, “When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus.”<sup>12</sup> Felix was the first governor. Now he is being succeeded

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 24:21

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 24:27

by this new man Porcius Festus. “And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.”<sup>13</sup>

Do you see what Luke is saying here? That Felix in order to do the Jews a favor, he left Paul in prison for two years without any reason to do so. He should have freed Paul immediately. Instead Paul is left to languish in this prison in Caesarea for two whole years. And as far as we can tell in reading Paul’s letters, this two years is never referred to.

Now you get to the prison epistles in Philippians and Colossians and so forth and Paul is now in a Roman prison, probably the second imprisonment. But Paul here spent two years in this prison and nothing outwardly is accomplished.

Now I am... I would suppose if Paul had a good relationship with God and Paul was trusting God during this time, Paul was applying what he teaches in his letters. But as far as anything happening, it was a zero. Nothing was happening. No letters were written that we know of. No one was won to Christ. No Philippian jailer comes and falls down before him and says, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”<sup>14</sup> Absolutely nothing is said about these two years.

Now, I am from Colorado, at least I have been from Colorado since 1965. So I am what the Coloradans call a semi native. And I am not big into sports, but I do kind of follow the Denver Broncos National Football League team. And back in the late 1990s, I think it was 98, 99, somewhere in there. John Elway, who was the quarterback for the Denver Broncos for 17 years finally won two back to back Superbowls. But he was the key, he was the lynchpin of the team. He was the one who would pull a game out of the fire when it was almost lost and he was the hero among Coloradans.

Now suppose that in John Elway’s hey day when he was really the star, when things were going well and the Broncos were winning and these kinds of things, suppose that the coach had pulled John Elway out of the game for an entire season. I mean, he has won... Let’s just set up this scenario. Last year he wins the Superbowl. This year he is benched. No reason given. The team doesn’t call a press conference to explain why, just as God does not explain why God was left in prison for two years.

Paul was God’s star quarterback. He was the apostle to the Gentiles. You think of the great theologian and the church planter and the cross cultural missionary and the evangelist and all of these things. I mean he was so superbly gifted and he was God’s apostle to the Gentiles. And yet God pulls him out of the game as it were and allows him to sit on the bench—using football terminology—God pulls him out of the game and leaves him to sit on the bench for two whole years.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 16:30

Now would you have done that? Does it not seem as if those two years were wasted because we have nothing in Scripture that tells us of anything that was accomplished during that time? And so we can look at that and we can say, “God, what are you doing?”

You see, we want to be God’s consultant. We want to be God’s counselor.

We say, “God, I look at creation and I marvel at your infinite wisdom in creation, but then I look at what you do with the apostle Paul and, Lord, it doesn’t make sense. I question it. And then I look at what you are doing in my life, God, and it doesn’t make sense and I question it.”

One of these days when we are with him in the new heavens and the new earth I am sure that we are going to look back and it is going to all make sense.

You know, in a weaving and in a design you can have this design and the weaver is doing this very beautiful design, but on the underneath side you see all of the ends of the threads and it doesn’t make sense.

You see, and it is God is doing a weaving in each of our lives. And we see the underside and we see all of these mass of threads and they simply do not make sense. But God sees the upper side. God sees the beautiful design that he is working in our lives.

And folks that are trusting, I mean instead of questioning God’s ways with us, we need to learn to trust him and to accept what he is doing and to believe that his wisdom is infinitely higher than our wisdom.

John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace* is one of my heroes. I have the *Works of John Newton*. It comes about this much space on one of my bookshelves. But my favorite book by John Newton is not *The Works of John Newton*, but it is the little paperback called *The Letters of John Newton* and it is some of the letters that John Newton wrote to various people. And in one of those letters he said these words. And I am, you know, I am quoting. He says, “One of the marks of Christian maturity is an acquiescence in the Lord’s will” acquiescence meaning being an acceptance of the Lord’s will, “and the persuasion of his wisdom, his holiness, his sovereignty and his goodness.”

And then he says, “How highly does it become us both as creatures and as sinners to submit to the appointments of our maker?”

And then I added, this is mine, “Not only our maker, but our heavenly Father,” because how highly does it become us both as creatures and as sinners to submit to the appointment of our maker and how necessary to our peace. To acquiesce in the Lord’s will means that we accept, as it were, God’s agenda for our lives.

You know, all of us have an agenda. We have a general agenda and then we have specific agenda. We have plans. We have things we want to accomplish, things that we want to see happen.



Yesterday morning when I got out of bed, I had an agenda. I wanted to get an airplane from Colorado Springs to Denver and from Denver to Fargo and arrive by one o'clock so that I could speak with the pastors at 2:30 or whatever the time was. That was my agenda.

See, and as I am sitting on the airplane—and I told you about this last night—as I am sitting on the airplane and I see ice on the windows and we are in line to be deiced and my watch is going around and at times like this it seems like the hands just go like this, you know. And 40 minutes rapidly passes by and I know that the time for my connection in Denver is going like this. And, as I mentioned last night, I literally walked off the airplane from Colorado Springs, walked down [?], walked on the airplane to Fargo in time to be on that plane before it left.

But, you see, my agenda was that. But God might have a different agenda. And every one of us every day have an agenda. And it is not that our agenda is wrong. And it often times we are able to accomplish our agenda and sometimes my wife and I at the end of the day as we lie down in bed and we ask each other about our day and she will say, “Well, I was able to thus and thus and thus.”

And I can say, “I was able to do this.” Or I might say, “Boy, I didn’t get a thing done today.”

But, you see, we all have plans. We all have agendas. But the fact is, every day of our lives when we get out of bed God also has an agenda for us. Now sometimes God’s agenda and our agenda are the same essentially. Sometimes God’s agenda and our agenda is different.

The question is this. Whose agenda is best? Is God’s agenda best or is my agenda best? Now, obviously, we look at our agenda and we think it is best. But what we ought to realize is that when God’s agenda is different from ours, his agenda is best. God purposes only good for us. So remember the good is not happiness, but the good is conformity to the likeness of Christ.

[?] what Paul tells us we cannot get away from what Paul tells us in Romans 8:28 and 29, that God causes all of these things, God’s agenda for us which involves the good things and the bad things, which involves our plans being fulfilled and our plans being thwarted and disappointed, God is causing all of these things to work together for our good to make us more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so God is infinitely wise, just as he wisdom in creation is far beyond, I mean it is infinitely—and I use that word carefully and deliberately—it is infinitely, God’s wisdom is infinitely greater than ours.

And we see this in creation, but we question in his providence because often times his wisdom is expressing itself in ways different than ours.

And so we come back, again, to this three legged stool and let me just say this. You have to have all three of them and they all three have to be equal length [?]. I mean if you think of the stool and if it has got three legs and you really believe in the sovereignty of God and so you have got a long leg here. But then you are not so sure about the love of God and that leg is short. Do you realize that stool is useless?

In order for a three legged stool to be useful, all three legs have to be equal in length. And so our belief in the sovereignty of God, our belief in the love of God, our belief in the wisdom of God have to be equal.

Now so often times we talk about the sovereignty of God. In fact, in the book *Trusting God* I deal with all three of these, but admittedly I give more space to the sovereignty of God because that is one that is so often denied in our culture today, even in some cases by people who call themselves evangelicals. But it used to distress me when maybe a pastor or somebody, you know, knowledgeable about theology would say to me, “That was a good book on the sovereignty of God.” And that would so distress me and the reason it would so distress me was because I would think, “Isn’t it a good book about the love of God? Isn’t it a good book about the wisdom of God?”

We need all three.

I have a friend who is a missionary to missionaries. Or maybe a better word would be that he is a pastor to missionaries up in Alaska. And the state of Alaska, which is huge—it is twice the size of the state of Texas where I grew up which used to be the largest state in the union. Now it is a poor second. But in Alaska the Alaskan’s speak of the state... They have two words to describe the state. The eastern one third they call it the road system. And the western two thirds they call it the bush. And out in the bush there are no roads whatsoever. I mean, zero, none. Your only access to the villages and so forth is if the village is on a river or stream, well, then you might have access by boat. Otherwise it is by plane and in the old days by horse, by dogsled, but now by plane.

And so they have these missionaries all out in the bush of Alaska and they are serviced by plane. They get there by plane. Their supplies come in by plane. They go out by plane. I mean, they are totally dependent on planes. And my friend started off as a missionary pilot that was, you know, taking missionaries out and so forth. And he began to realize that he was taking missionaries out and it wasn’t too long before he was bringing them back and I am mean bringing them back permanently.

And so he changed from being a missionary pilot to being a pastor to missionaries. And now he has this small organization that is totally dedicated just to ministering to the physical and emotional and spiritual needs of these missionaries who are isolated out in the bush.

So keep in mind, now, that his ministry is a Barnabas type ministry. It is a ministry of encouragement to missionaries.

Now with that background, about two or three years ago he was down in States and while he was in the States he heard of another pilot back in Alaska who was a friend of his. In fact, this pilot's father in law was a member of his board and this pilot was not a missionary pilot. He was commercial pilot who would fly hunters out into the high country and this kind of thing.

And this pilot and his wife and their three small daughters are coming in for a landing and I have been there where this is and I can visualize it. And there is a huge lake beyond the runway.

It was winter time and he came in and it was foggy and he overshot the runway and he ended up landing on the ice in the river and the ice fell through and the plane fell into the water.

Somehow in ways that they are not quite sure of, he and his wife got out of the plane, but not the three daughters. They were drowned.

My friend is down in California and he receives Word about this tragedy in the family of one of his dear friends. He is making plans to go back to Alaska to immediately to be with his friend and before he can get on the airplane he receives a phone call that his unsaved brother back in Tennessee has just committed suicide.

You talk about a double whammy. He experienced it.

Now in the weeks following that as he was seeking to deal with these issues he was constantly going back, "God is sovereign, God is in control." And finally one day one of his friends said to him, he said, "You believe in the sovereignty of God, but you don't believe in the love of God."

I want to ask you today: Do you really believe in the love of God? Do you believe in the wisdom of God?

You see, all three of these truths have to be held equally together. It is no comfort to believe that God is in control if at the same time you don't believe that God loves you and God cares for you and God will never forget you. And if, at the same time you do not believe that God in his infinite wisdom knows what he is doing...

And so despite all appearances to the contrary we should realize that God purposes only our good, but that good is conformity to the likeness of Jesus.

Shall we pray?

*Father, you know in my own heart and life that it is much easier to preach this than it is to practice it. And we are entirely dependent upon the enabling power of your Holy Spirit. Lord, left to ourselves we would not trust you. We would doubt you. We would cry out against you and it is only by faith that we can trust you. It is only by faith that we can*

*cling to your promise that you will never leave us nor forsake us. It is only by faith that we realize that your wisdom is infinite as it pertains to us.*

*And, Father, you must give us the faith. Now it is true that faith comes through they promises as we believe the promises, but we need your Holy Spirit to enable us. And so we look to you again.*

*And, Father, again I would just like to pray for those in the audience today who are experiencing deep pain and I pray that none of these words would hurt them, would cause them to think, "If he only knew what I was going through he wouldn't be so glib in his answers."*

*Lord, I know that there are people who are experiencing things far, far worse than ever I have experienced, but nothing worse than your Son experienced when he bore your wrath in our place on the cross.*

*Father, I pray that your Holy Spirit would help us to believe these truths and to be comforted and encouraged through them. And, again, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*