

Dialogue I

God Is Infinitely WISE: We Have Access to His Wisdom

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In a study of wisdom (God's wisdom in particular), Chewning presents a hierarchy of definitions and analyzes five core components inherent in God's wisdom.

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
Romans 11:33*

God alone is wise.¹
His wisdom is a property of his eternal, immutable nature. He did not acquire it. He is simply by nature infinitely wise. It was He “who established the world by His *wisdom*, and by His *understanding* ... stretched out the heavens.”² All that He wills — *causes* and *decrees* — manifests His infinite wisdom. *There is absolutely nothing that takes place within the created order that is outside of the realm of God's faultless wisdom.*

Can the statement just made really be true? Yes! Even the fall of humanity and the resulting sin that has entered the world manifest the infinite wisdom of God. It is even said that “the wrath of man shall praise Thee”

and “with a remnant of wrath Thou shalt gird Thyself.”³ Such perplexing truths are beyond our full comprehension. We need only turn to statements like the one quoted at the beginning of this article — “How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways” — to remind ourselves of our finitude as we face the unfathomable depths of all of God's infinite and perfect attributes. How wonderful and glorious it is that God is at one and the same time searchable and unsearchable, fathomable and unfathomable, and comprehensible and inscrutable.⁴

Just what is *wisdom*? In order to adequately answer this question we will first build a hierarchy of definitions. Their

importance is highlighted by the revelation of Isaiah 11:2. Here we find that the Spirit of the Lord, Who was prophesied to come and rest upon Jesus, is the Spirit of knowledge, the Spirit of understanding, and the Spirit of wisdom.⁵ Knowledge precedes understanding, and understanding precedes wisdom (in the human's experience, not God's). We will therefore develop the hierarchy of definitions in the order of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, as wisdom utilizes and rests on the other two.

Knowledge

Two types of knowledge are ever before humans during their waking hours. First, there are the observable *static facts* of what is surrounding us in our environment and the *static facts* we have stored in our memory, ready for recall given an appropriate stimulus. Individual facts make up the raw material of our knowledge and may be combined to make up a complex system of knowledge. For example, a person can possess many facts about an automobile and thus be said to know much about cars — an aggregation of thousands of individual parts assembled together. Static facts, either as

individual components or as aggregated combinations, comprise the raw material of what makes up “knowledge.”

The second type of knowledge concerns itself with what might be called *dynamic facts* or knowledge about “systems” that are either alive or in motion. Using the automobile again as an example, a person can know how the thousands of individual parts that go into the assembly of an automobile all fit together and know how they work together to make the car run and function. Or, using another example, a person can know how the blood circulates through the human body. These are examples of dynamic forms of knowledge.

Living in an “information age” as we do has led many people to say and believe that knowledge is power. On the surface this perception seems plausible. The sheer volume of information that is being continuously transmitted across a myriad of delivery systems, and the *potential* importance of this knowledge, leads people to assume that those with the knowledge have an automatic advantage that gives them competitive power. This *can* be true, but information (knowledge) separated from *understanding* and

wisdom can be described also as the raw material for bad decisions and chaos. Knowledge is the foundation for both wrong thinking and right thinking. Understanding and wisdom both rest on knowledge, but knowledge without understanding and wisdom could be likened to a torpedo without its guidance system — lots of latent power but with little chance of reaching its objective.

Regarding God's knowledge, however, the kind of distinctions just outlined regarding human knowledge are irrelevant when one considers God's infinite and eternal knowledge — absolute knowledge of everything past, present, future, and suppositional. But nevertheless, it must not be overlooked that God's wisdom is only possible because He is omniscient — all knowing. Without this perfect knowledge, God would not be absolutely wise.

Understanding

In the forward-looking sense, *understanding* is the comprehension (foreknowledge⁶) of the probable consequences (from the human's perspective) of the “cause and effect” outcomes of specific proposed actions or non-actions. Understanding can

be said to be the comprehension of the dynamic consequences that accompany the interaction between the specific details that comprise the individual's knowledge base. Understanding embodies the grasping of consequential relationships and the effects of combining specific causes — touching a hot stove with a bare finger will bring about pain, for example. It must be acknowledged, however, that unanticipated countervailing forces may come into play while complex “cause and effect” events are being worked out, skewing the anticipated outcomes. But it is the understanding of this very reality that allows people to make mid-course corrections in their ongoing decision-making processes.

It is human understanding that provides the opportunity for the individual or group to have some level of control over the outcome of their decisions. Without understanding there would be no possible sense of direction associated with decision-making of any type. Understanding is what is needed prior to taking an action. Understanding builds upon and follows knowledge and precedes wisdom. But before we move on


to wisdom, we need to make another critical observation and explain its significance.

Understanding also has a backward-looking aspect to it. God understands that we are but made of the dust of the earth and that we are but frail creatures.⁷ He understands why every human does everything he or she does. And we humans also learn from or gain understanding from our past experiences. So understanding, as knowledge, may be static or fluid, and it may be backward-looking or forward-looking. With God, of course, all matters past, present, and future stand before Him perpetually and eternally.

Knowledge and understanding that are associated with the physical, temporal realm but are unassociated with the spiritual, eternal realm are incomplete forms of knowledge and understanding. God's image bearers have the potential to have the mind of Christ. But it must also be remembered that only the regenerate children of God actually have that potential fulfilled in them to any degree whatsoever.

To illustrate — the brilliant, unregenerate mind, while possibly having a profound grasp on both the knowledge and

understanding of some significant temporal reality, will nevertheless lack the broader and deeper knowledge and understanding that surrounds that particular reality when it remains unassociated with its Creator. Such a person misses the deeper



... God alone (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is wisdom and its only true wellspring.

knowledge and understanding that is associated with God's ultimate purposes that manifest His glory, power, and wisdom. For example, when we read Chapters 38-41 of Job and contemplate Job's confession in Chapter 42,⁸ we see a clear example of the shift from incomplete knowledge and understanding to full knowledge and understanding. The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in Job's life transformed his former knowledge and understanding into a humiliating heap of repentance. This occurred as God's majesty was revealed to him as he grasped (through the inner work of the Holy Spirit) God's sovereign rule over the laying of the foundation of the

earth,⁹ His ruling of the sea,¹⁰ His ability to cause the dawn to know its place,¹¹ etc. Knowledge and understanding that are appropriately connected to their Creator are profoundly fuller and deeper forms of knowledge and understanding.

God's understanding, while not generally listed as one of His attributes, is nonetheless one of His distinguishing characteristics — a true attribute. The Psalmist tells us, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that "His understanding is infinite."¹² And the prophet Isaiah tells us that "His understanding is inscrutable" — so profound and deep as to be beyond searching out.¹³ God understands every effect brought about by every cause. And He understands the antecedent to every cause. His understanding is infinite, and His knowledge and understanding undergird His infinite wisdom.

Wisdom

God's wisdom has three core components and two environmental components. The three core components constitute the heart of wisdom while the environmental realities provide a broader context in which to contemplate God's infinite wisdom. The first core

element is the comprehension of the right end of a matter, *as determined by God*. The second core factor is the right end waiting for and working itself out through appropriate means and circumstances. And the third core component is the right end nurtured by the right reasons. The two environmental components that always underlie God's wisdom are His complete foreknowledge of all second causes and their subsequent consequences, and the fact that God's wisdom always allows for and takes into account the true freedom He has bestowed upon His image bearers. The absence of any of these five elements would disqualify the outcome from being called the wisdom of God.

God's wisdom can also be referred to as God's *light* that leads His children along the true, good, and satisfying path of life. His wisdom is declared in His Word and is made effectual in the Christian's heart by the Holy Spirit. God's wisdom is perfectly embodied in Christ. Christ is God's wisdom incarnate and God's wisdom sent to His image bearers.¹⁴ Indeed, God alone (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is wisdom and its only true wellspring.¹⁵

Wisdom is part of the very essence of God. It is not an addition to or something acquired by Him. His knowledge and understanding are infinite and perfect so that the complete picture of the right ends and appropriate means and circumstances, in the context of His right reasons, are ever before Him. His absolute foreknowledge of the actions and reactions of all second causes¹⁶ is such that God is capable of ordaining the accomplishment of the right end for all of His creation. Indeed He has declared “the end from the beginning”¹⁷ without denying His image bearers the freedom to exercise their own will — *a will that manifests the current state of their nature*. We will now look at these five aspects in depth.

Wisdom embodies right ends, as determined by God.

The right end to any thing, event, or life can only be discerned in the light of God’s *sovereign* purposes and ends, as revealed in the Scripture. Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of God (this is His decreed, permissive will, not causative will).¹⁸ God misses nothing or overlooks nothing that either will take place or does take place in the universe at any time.

He rules over and through everything absolutely and infallibly.

Consideration of any right end necessitates considering the fact that the discussion of any particular end requires that the end be considered in a context. For example, there is an eternal end, a temporal end, and many intermediate ends — the end of a ball game, the end of a meal, the end to a court case, the end of a hospital stay, etc. God’s children, having access to the mind of Christ, have access to God’s wisdom concerning a multitude of ends.

For example, the revealed wisdom of God declares that the eternal end of those redeemed by God’s grace, through faith in Christ’s sacrificial atoning death, is eternal life.¹⁹ The Christian knows that he or she does not face annihilation at the time of death. Instead, believers will experience a resurrected life of eternal perfection that is lived in pure worship, joyful communion, and purposeful fellowship that resounds to the praise, honor, and glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God has declared this to be true in His infinite wisdom.

Equally true, however, is the revelation that speaks of the

eternal punishment that awaits those who have suppressed God’s truth in unrighteousness. In doing so they reject Christ as their Lord and Savior. They are those who rely upon their own self-righteousness to please the “gods” they serve, “gods” they self-created in their own image. And in living this way, their lives are lived out in accordance with their own self-will, not the creative will (active will) of God. Their eternal end is their eternal separation from any fellowship or communion with their Creator.²⁰

Eternal life with God and a life of eternal separation from God are both infinitely wise ends from God’s perspective. No human knows why God allows some image bearers to persist in their rejection of His mercy and grace that ends in their choosing eternal separation (hell) from their Creator. No human knows why God pursues other equally alienated and rebellious image bearers and initiates a “Spirit generated rebirth”²¹ within them that results in their choosing Christ, bringing with it the gift of eternal life. Both ends are, however, infinitely wise even though such wisdom transcends our capacity to comprehend it.

Intermediate ends, on the other hand, serve as means to

greater ends in God’s economy. A temporal end might be the completion of a college degree program or having one’s leg amputated to stop the spread of bone cancer. The first example is a joyous conclusion to an extended period of study in anticipation of applying the acquired benefits to the working out of a meaningful life. And the second example is one of a very sobering experience that causes the patient, and those who love him or her, to reflect upon the deepest aspects of life and its meaning and purpose. But *all* intermediate ends are under the sovereign oversight and rule of our loving Heavenly Father.

Romans 8:28-29 speaks directly to this great truth. It reveals “that God causes *all things* to work together for good to those who love God, *to those who are called according to His purpose*. For whom He *foreknew*, He also *predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the first-born among many brethren” (emphasis added). The simple and the great events of life are *all* decreed (foreordained, i.e., purposefully allowed or brought about) by God for our good — that we would *become conformed to the image of Christ*. That is the

highest end of all intermediate ends. It is observed in God's use of the temporal reality as He shapes the human heart of His adopted children into the likeness of Christ. This is being done so His children will fulfill His purpose for them in their temporal life and be prepared for their eternal life.²²

Those who reject God's purpose for themselves, however, are left to their own devices and move ever closer to their chosen self-destructive ends where all things do not work together for their good end.²³ A brief theological excursion seems to be in order at this juncture in order to see what God's Word has to say about those who willfully persist in their separation from Christ rather than respond to the free offer of eternal life. First, we know that those who reject the truth concerning Christ "are without excuse," for deep within their hearts they know the truth.²⁴ Since in God's eyes no human is righteous,²⁵ it follows then that God must decide who will be the recipients of His mercy,²⁶ since none merit or deserve His mercy. Indeed, every human merits and deserves the wrath of God. But it is at the same time important to point out that God does not *cause* any of His image bearers to reject

Him. When Scripture declares, which it does, that God said, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy," and follows it with "He hardens whom He desires,"²⁷ it is not saying that God took a "good" heart and hardened it. This is never to be implied or asserted. Then just what is involved in the idea that God hardens hearts?

An illustration or an analogy at this juncture will be helpful in explaining what Scripture is disclosing when it says that God "hardens whom He desires." If one were to put a ball of wax on a sidewalk on the hottest day of summer and let the sun shine on the wax, the ball would become soft and malleable. But if a dish of ready-to-pour concrete were placed right next to the ball of wax, on the same hot summer day, the sun would harden the concrete, not soften it as it had the wax. The difference in the results is to be found in the *nature* of the substance being placed on the sidewalk, not in the temperature or nature of the sun.

Now let us apply this analogy to our human condition. All humans are conceived in sin and born in sin; we all have a sin nature that is thoroughly alienated from God.²⁸ But God has mercy on those whom He chooses to

give to His Son as an inheritance.²⁹ And this mercy is effectively poured out on them individually as the Holy Spirit effects their "new birth"³⁰ — changes their old nature (heart of liquid concrete) to a new nature (heart of wax).

In the face of this reality, one may ask, "But is this just or fair for God to do this sort of thing?"

The Apostle Paul asked this very question in Romans 9 — "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" (verse 14). Then he adds the following, two verses later: "So then *it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs*, but on God who has mercy" (verse 16, emphasis added). If no one deserves God's mercy, then those who are *not* the beneficiaries of His mercy are not being dealt with unjustly when God's mercy is not effectually applied to their hearts, making them new creatures.³¹

Many Christians still quarrel with God today over this revelation. But so did many in the days of the Apostle Paul. Paul met their objections head-on. He said, under the inspiration of

the Holy Spirit, just three verses later in Romans 9:19-23 —

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?

... God does not cause any of His image bearers to reject Him.

The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a

*right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And **He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory** (emphasis added).*

Perhaps it was a statement like this one that the Apostle Peter had in mind when he was writing and referring to some of Paul's letters and said of them "in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught ... distort ...".³²

Our brief theological excursion will now be brought to a conclusion. The point that has been made is a straightforward one. *Everybody would remain eternally alienated from God without the merciful intervention of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those whom God the Father gives and draws to Christ so they may become Christ's eternal inheritance.*³³ Those who are given new life in Christ are as unworthy of receiving this infinitely valuable gift of grace as are those who do not receive this gift of grace. The Word of God never reveals why particular individuals are chosen by God to receive eternal life in Christ and why others are left to their self-prescribed alienating devices that culminate in their eternal separation from God. Scripture, however, repeatedly and forthrightly sets forth this truth regarding God's grace and mercy.

But the Christian may be certain that every event and experience in his or her life is foreknown by God and intended in His economy for his or her eventual edification and building up in Christ³⁴ — the greatest intermediate end — in preparation for the much anticipated eternal end — eternal life. For the non-Christian,

however, their inheritance is what they receive in this life.³⁵

Christians seeking God's wisdom need to ask themselves if their own hearts are fixed on what they know to be God's right ends; this is a key, core component of wisdom. God has revealed to us in His Word many of His right ends; the Old Testament and New Testament both provide us with many illustrations of right ends. It is our job to examine the ends we seek in our heart in the light of God's revelation concerning His thoughts about what right ends are. Will our intended action or non-action glorify God? Will it lead to an end, as best as we can tell, that will be constructive for those who are impacted by the action? Is what we are contemplating loving, just, righteous, and holy? If we can answer these kinds of questions affirmatively, we can be sure that we are at least seeking God's wisdom.

Wisdom exemplifies the right end waiting for and working itself out through appropriate means and circumstances.

This dimension of wisdom is most easily determinable in the purely temporal realm of appropriate means and circumstances. It is much more

of an exercise of faith in the deeper interface between the spiritual and temporal facets of life. The following example of a fundamentally temporal right intermediate end seeking an appropriate means and circumstance to bring about the desired end will illustrate this point. If a person with an abscessed tooth, accompanied by much swelling but with little pain at this point in time, goes to his dentist, the dentist may deem it best (wise) to begin the patient on a regimen of antibiotics before pulling the tooth, thus reducing the possible spread of the infection that might occur if the tooth is pulled immediately. This kind of temporal wisdom comes from the dentist's medical training that was based on years of clinical observations, personal experience, and the apparent accompanying circumstances (the absence of any acute pain). This kind of temporal wisdom is needed over and over again in our daily lives. This is wisdom that applies to people and their relationship to the maintenance of things — cars, boats, houses, machinery, etc.

The next level of wisdom involves people and things and their stewardship responsibilities before God. For example, people

need wisdom when they buy a house — how big a house; a fixed or variable rate of interest mortgage; how many years should the mortgage run; in what school district should the house be located; etc. Wisdom is needed when people buy a car — should they pay cash or buy it on credit; should they buy a new or used car; what make and model is appropriate; etc. Much of the wisdom that pertains to our personal relationships with temporal objects is obtainable through natural observations and common sense that are accompanied by a desire to live in harmony with our circumstances in life. This first level of wisdom is available to everybody regardless of the state of the person's heart before God. But Christians have a far deeper and more fundamental responsibility before God than just "worldly-wise," prudential behavior. Christians have a stewardship responsibility that may find them making choices based on things other than utilitarian criteria. Our love for Christ may lead us to do things that would be deemed ultraconservative or ultraliberal from a prudential, utilitarian perspective.

One can argue that non-Christians also have such a

stewardship responsibility, which will prove to be true on the day of their accountability before Christ,³⁶ but as long as they remain alienated from Christ they suppress and repress any such notions, both of stewardship and their accountability before God.³⁷

But wisdom for the individual Christian regarding decisions about housing, cars, work locations, and hundreds of other matters are to be settled before Christ on the basis of the individual's faith in Christ's leading. (The following section dealing with the right end nurtured by the right reasons speaks to the tension being raised here.)

The deeper form of wisdom that seeks the right end while waiting for the appropriate means and circumstances is the wisdom of: a) knowing when to be quiet and when to speak; b) knowing when to go and when to stay; c) knowing when to lend a helping hand and when to stand by and watch; d) knowing when to encourage and when to correct; e) knowing when to try again and when to quit trying; and a host of other countervailing alternatives. Here again we are called upon to act in faith. We seek Christ's

wisdom in the Scripture, and we seek His mind regarding the "what, when, where, and how" through prayer as it regards the matter before us; we use the best sense He has given us; and we proceed in the belief that we are

doing what He would have us do. Time and time alone will prove if the Holy Spirit applied our acts and words (our

perceived wisdom) to the situation and circumstances we believed we were led to address. God alone is Wisdom. We simply seek to be instruments of His wisdom.

Wisdom exemplifies the right end nurtured by the right reason.

This third and final core component inherent in God's wisdom is in many ways the area requiring the greatest work in our lives by the Holy Spirit if we, too, are to manifest God's wisdom. (The two environmental components underlying God's wisdom will be discussed after this final core component is laid out.)

Right reasons are an eternal and inherent property of God's nature. Every facet of His sovereign rule, manifested

through both His creative will and decretive will, manifests His *glory* — the honor, esteem, majesty, and "weight" due Him.³⁸ God the Father's right reasons that are associated with His will are tied closely to His love for His Son. God the Father has given everything in heaven and on earth to His Son.³⁹ And without exception, everything that transpires ultimately resounds to God's glory. Even Satan's dastardly deeds are only allowed within the limits of God's permissiveness. The biblical account of God's limiting Satan's attacks on Job are instructive at this point.

*And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth ...". Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house ... But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, **only do not put forth your hand on him**"* (emphasis added).⁴⁰

During the next round of discussions between God and

Satan (Job 2), God lets Satan attack Job again but does not allow Satan to take his life.⁴¹ Yes, even all evil will ultimately resound to the glory of God. God's right reasons are behind all of His creative and decretive will, and everything will bring glory to His name. Indeed, we His image bearers were created for His glory (see Isaiah 43:7; 42:8; and 48:11).

The key question, then, that any human should ask when seeking the right reasons that would nurture a right end should be "Will this action glorify God?" This of course leads directly to other important questions. Do we long to glorify God? When was the last time a strong desire to glorify God motivated me? By God's grace the desire to glorify Him can yet become the guiding reason in our hearts for seeking particular ends. This should be the beginning place for the human's quest for a right reason that is sufficient to nurture a right end. The right ends God wants us to seek are generally cognitively discerned and volitionally acted upon. The appropriate means and circumstances that the human is to relate to the right ends are also, for the most part, cognitively discerned and volitionally acted upon. But the right reason

component of wisdom is a motivational and attitudinal matter.

In our fallen world, right reasons are generally crowded from our mind by “my reasons,” with little if any regard for God’s reasons. This should not be so in the life of a Christian. God’s reasons always resound to His eternal glory, for His reasons are the motivating force guiding the circumstances and means used by Him to bring about His desired ends. This reality lay behind Christ’s discourse with His disciples when they encountered the blind man and asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” The disciples associated blindness with some kind of divine punishment for sin. Christ’s response provided a new world/lifeview for them, and us, when He said, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.”⁴²

God’s absolute, sovereign rule over seemingly horrible circumstances in life is also pointed to in His discourse with Moses when Moses was complaining about God’s instructing him to go back to Egypt to confront Pharaoh.

Moses argued against going and said, “I am slow of speech and slow of tongue,” to which God responded, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?”⁴³ Even our human defects are part of God’s infinitely wise and glorious decrees brought into reality through providence. What He causes and what He permits are both His will, and they both resound to His infinite and eternal glory.

The seemingly tragic events that can and do befall us are our homework and tests in life to train us in godly attitudes, thoughts, motives, and behavior.⁴⁴ Right reasons generate the energy (motivation) and will (perseverance) to see the means and circumstances through to the right end. It is in this sense that the right reasons nurture or encourage the accomplishment of the right end. Knowing God’s reason — to conform us to the likeness of Christ⁴⁵ — is a balm to tough circumstances. Right reasons are the womb of love’s power to help us see the means and circumstances of life as God’s vehicle to transport us onward toward our eternal end. And in the same manner, all intermediate ends are stepping

stones along the path of life. Everything has its place and purpose in God’s economy. To embrace, articulate, and live out this world/lifeview, in the context of life’s experiences, is to glorify our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Wisdom exemplifies God’s complete foreknowledge of all second causes and their subsequent consequences.

Our foreknowledge is extremely limited. God’s is infinite. The difference is a great indicator of just how truly dependent we are upon God’s guidance and provision of His wisdom if we are to have any godly wisdom at all.

What is a “second cause?” Second causes are all activities of humans, animals, mechanics, and nature. Any and all activities that have been set in motion as a consequence of God’s act of creation (God is the First Cause) constitute a second cause. For example, a person who walks out of his or her home, gets into a car, starts it, and drives to the post office to mail a letter performs a number of second cause activities and at the same time sets into motion many more second causes that will follow — the activities of those who handle

the mail, the activities of the recipient of the mail, and other subsequent actions. Should a car accident occur on the way to the post office, an entirely more complicated set of second causes might be set in motion. A dog barking represents a second cause. A clock running makes up a second cause. A hurricane and a wave are both second causes. All subsequent behavior that flows from God’s creation, apart from His active participation, is known as a second cause phenomenon.

God knows all second causes before any of them occur. In fact, He has known them all perfectly from eternity past. Psalm 139:15-16 and Job 14:5 both make this point clearly.

My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them (Psalm 139:15-16).

Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with Thee, and his limits Thou hast set so that he cannot pass (Job 14:5).

How can this be so without concluding that some form of determinism or fatalism is at work in our lives? We must say with the prophet Isaiah, “His understanding is inscrutable.”⁴⁶ Indeed, God challenged the people in the day of Isaiah to step forward and declare what was going to transpire in the future so that they might be recognized as “gods.”⁴⁷ Only God infallibly knows the future, and He asks, “To whom then will you liken Me that I should be his equal?”⁴⁸

The point here, however, is that God’s infinite wisdom not only encompasses right ends, appropriate means and circumstances, and right reasons, but it also rests atop His perfect foreknowledge that gives Him the completed picture of outcomes. This complete picture is an essential component of God’s perfect wisdom, for without it He would be as much in the dark as are His creatures.

We, His image bearers, have limited foreknowledge within the confines of God’s established physical and moral laws that are observable in the sphere of what is often called natural law. We know when the sun will rise and set. We know the ocean tides. We grasp the concept of gravity. We know that stealing will get us

in trouble. The best source of our foreknowledge, however, is to be found in the pages of Scripture. The Holy Spirit has taught God’s children that His revelation of His moral law is good and perfect, guiding us in a path that bears good fruit. We do not have to experiment with pornography to know that it undermines God’s best intentions for His people — devalues the person posing for the pictures; undermines one’s respect for the human body; and places images in the observers mind that are easily brought back to consciousness when stimulated by other events. We do not have to practice unnatural sexual relationships to personally discover their consequences — God has told us they are harmful. Gossiping, coveting, lying, stealing, being unfaithful, cursing, having a contentious spirit, and a host of other ungodly behaviors are to be avoided with the Spirit’s help. Our foreknowledge extends this far, but little beyond it. We do know that unhealthy consequences will result from certain behavior or thought patterns.

But we do not know if the young person we are considering marrying will prove as attractive to us in ten years as they do now. Nor do we know if the risk we

are taking in our business will result in a great success or even a bitter failure. We do not know if we will get through next week without a bad accident. We do not know when or how to confront an alcoholic friend about his or her need for help. Is when they are sober the only good time to confront them? Do we speak to them when they seem to be “up” or when they are “down?”

Our foreknowledge is extremely limited when compared to

God’s perfect foreknowledge. Our very limitation, however, is simply an opportunity to be reminded of our true dependency upon God, His wisdom, and His guidance in all of life. It is wonderful that we have been promised that “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”⁴⁹

God’s wisdom takes into account the true freedom He has bestowed upon His image bearers.

Perhaps the greatest testimony to the incomprehensible magnitude of God’s infinite wisdom is His perfect foreknowledge of our personal choices that are going to be made

freely (in the context of our nature). These are choices that He has eternally known and factored into His perfect wisdom — wisdom that is revealed to us through His eternal decrees that we learn about through providence. There is, for this author at least, a no more mind-boggling reality about the awesome character of God’s

Only God infallibly knows the future ...

omniscient and infinitely wise nature than this — He has known throughout

eternity what I would freely choose at every turn in my life and has incorporated this reality into His eternal purposes infallibly and unchangeably.⁵⁰ Wow! What an “I AM” He is.⁵¹

Our personalities, and the outcomes that emanate from them, are so perfectly known and understood by God that what passes as absolute freedom for us, in the context of our nature, has been eternally fixed and certain in the mind of God. It is not fixed and certain in the sense that God has caused or determined what we choose and therefore it must come to pass in some fatalistic sense, but only in the sense that His absolute insight into our being is so thoroughly complete that He knows with absolute

certainty what we will freely choose to say, do, think, or fail to do before we make our choices. Our free acts are fixed in the mind of God and have been real parts of His infinite knowledge and concurrent wisdom from all eternity. (Even if the reader decides to begin acting in uncharacteristically silly ways at this point in time to prove that God could not have known that his or her behavior would take such a bizarre turn at this time, the behavior would be as reflective of the actor's true personality as would any other free choice. Such behavior would merely reflect his or her desire to be autonomous⁵² and free from God's omniscient wisdom. Humans, however, cannot surprise God by anything they do or think.)

Conclusion

God's wisdom is His perspective on right ends that are to be nurtured by right reasons that are in turn to be worked out through appropriate means and circumstances, in the context of both His infinite and eternal foreknowledge and the freedom He has given His image bearers to make choices within the confines of their existing nature. Only God is wise.⁵³

We, God's image bearers, have access to portions of His wisdom through: a) observing and contemplating the natural laws (physical and moral) in the created order; b) reading and absorbing His revealed wisdom in the Scripture; and c) praying for God's wisdom in specific circumstances — prayer accompanied by genuine faith and answered through the unfolding of God's merciful and gracious providence.

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).

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ENDNOTES

- ¹Romans 16:27 — "to the *only wise God*, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever" (emphasis added).
- ²Jeremiah 51:15 (emphasis added).
- ³Psalms 76:10.
- ⁴God can only be described as "searchable," "fathomable," and "comprehensible" in the context of His special revelation of Himself, as delivered to His children in Scripture (Romans 11:33; Isaiah 40:28).
- ⁵Also see Proverbs 2:6.
- ⁶Only God has perfect foreknowledge, but humans can discern the "laws," both moral and physical, with which God has surrounded

us, and we can comprehend both the negative and positive consequences of ignoring or adhering to God's created order.

⁷Psalms 103:14; 78:39.

⁸"I have declared that which I did not *understand*, things too wonderful for me, which I did not *know*. ... I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3, 5, emphasis added). Job's expression "my eye sees Thee" refers to the eyes of the heart.

⁹Job 38:4.

¹⁰Job 38:8.

¹¹Job 38:12.

¹²Psalms 147:5.

¹³Isaiah 40:28.

¹⁴I Corinthians 1:24, 30.

¹⁵Romans 16:27.

¹⁶Second causes are all movements and actions within the created order — human behavior, storms, laws of physics in action, etc. — that are separate from the movements and actions of God, the First Cause.

¹⁷Isaiah 46:10.

¹⁸Matthew 10:29.

¹⁹Matthew 25:46; Mark 10:30; John 3:16;

6:54; 10:28; 12:25; 17:2-3; Acts 13:48;

Romans 2:7; 5:21; 6:23; etc.

²⁰Matthew 5:29-30; 8:12; 11:21-24; 13:40-42,

47-50; 18:8-9; 22:12-14; Mark 9:42-49;

Luke 12:5; 16:22-26; John 15:6; II Peter 2:4ff;

Revelation 19:19-20; 20:10; 20:14-15.

²¹John 3:3-8; 1:13; James 1:18; I Peter 1:23;

I John 2:29; 3:9.

²²Acts 13:36.

²³Luke 7:30-35.

²⁴Romans 1:1-20; Jeremiah 5:21-31.

²⁵Psalms 143:2; Isaiah 64:6.

²⁶Romans 9:15-16, 18; Exodus 33:19.

²⁷Romans 9:15, 18.

²⁸Psalms 51:5.

²⁹Psalms 33:12 — "The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance;" Ephesians 1:18; etc.

³⁰John 3:3-8; 1:13; James 1:18; I Peter 1:23; I John 2:29; 3:9.

³¹II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:4; Galatians 6:15.

³²II Peter 3:16.

³³John 6:37, 44, 65; Matthew 13:11.

³⁴Romans 8:28-29.

³⁵Psalms 17:14; Psalm 73:3-7; Luke 16:25-26; Job 21:7-19; Jeremiah 12:1-2.

³⁶Matthew 5:16 coupled with I Peter 2:12.

³⁷Romans 1:18-32.

³⁸Malachi 2:2; Luke 2:13-14; Acts 7:2;

Romans 11:36; II Corinthians 4:6;

Revelation 1:6; etc.

³⁹Colossians 1:16; Matthew 28:18; John 1:3;

3:35; 6:39; 13:3; 17:1-2, 6-7; etc.

⁴⁰Job 1:8-11 (emphasis added).

⁴¹Job 2:2-6.

⁴²John 9:2-3.

⁴³Exodus 4:10-11.

⁴⁴I Corinthians 4:5.

⁴⁵Romans 8:28-29.

⁴⁶Isaiah 40:28.

⁴⁷Isaiah 41:22-23; 42:9; 44:7-8; 46:10.

⁴⁸Isaiah 40:25 (also v. 18).

⁴⁹James 1:5.

⁵⁰Isaiah 40:28; 41:22-23; 42:9; 44:7-8; 46:10.

⁵¹Exodus 3:14; John 8:24, 28, 58 (John 8:24 and 28 both use the Greek word *eimi* — which means to "possess existence" or "to be" — and is associated with the Exodus 3:14 passage by most scholars. John 8:58 unmistakably intends to portray the connection between Christ and His eternal Personage.

⁵²Scripture nowhere acknowledges the existence of an autonomous free will for any human. It does acknowledge that humans have the freedom to exercise their will freely within the context of their nature — sinful and unregenerate; or sinful, but redeemed and regenerate.

⁵³Romans 16:27.

JBIB