

are especially helpful.

First, wisdom involves means and ends. Ends are goals or purposes. Means are the ways to reach these ends or goals or purposes. Wisdom chooses worthy ends and appropriate or fitting means to attain these ends. We see this in the absolutely perfect God in Romans 11, which speaks of “the depth of the riches” of God’s “*wisdom*” (33), “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (36).

Since “all things” are “*to him*” (36), Jehovah is the highest goal or end or purpose of everything. Since “all things” are “*of him*” as to their source in God’s decree, and “*through him*” in God’s creation and providence (36), the Most High uses everything as the means to achieve the goal of His glory! This is His deep and rich “wisdom” (33)!

A second helpful idea in understanding wisdom is that of adaptation. This concept is closely related to that of means and ends. God righteously adapts all things as means to obtain His holy end: His own glory and its manifestation.

God’s wisdom is seen in His Persons. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity is perfectly adapted to the First Person. He is the “only begotten Son” who fits beautifully in His Father’s “bosom” (John 1:18). He is the “express image” of His Father (Heb. 1:3). He is the radiant effulgence of His Father’s glory (Heb. 1:3). He is the wonderfully self-expressing Word of His Father (John 1:14). Thus the eternal Son speaks of His infinitely joyous relationship with His Father, “I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him” (Prov. 8:30). What a blessed adaptation!

Likewise, the Third Person of the Trinity is perfectly adapted to the First and Second Persons. The Holy Spirit is the personal breath of love that proceeds between the Father and the Son. The divine Spirit is the personal bond of love uniting the First and Second Persons. See how He is eternally and beautifully adapted for His role in the Godhead!

God’s wisdom is not only seen in His Three Persons but it is also evident in connection with His other divine perfections. We see this, for example, when we consider two attributes of God mentioned at the end of Romans 11.

First, Jehovah’s wisdom is an *infinite* wisdom: “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! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?” (33-34). God’s wisdom is perfectly adapted to who He is as the unsearchable and incomprehensible One.

Second, Jehovah’s wisdom is a *self-sufficient* wisdom: “who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?” (34-35). God’s wisdom is entirely like Himself, needing no advice, counsel or help. “For,” as the apostle goes on to say, “of him, and through him, and to him, are *all* things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (36)!

Rev. Stewart

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# Covenant Reformed News

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## God’s Wisdom (1)

The pagan nations around Israel claimed to be wise. We read of “the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22) and “the wise men” of Babylon in the book of Daniel (e.g., 2:12-14, 18, 24, 27, 48). Even the Edomites had their own wisdom traditions (Jer. 49:7; Obad. 8). The Greeks especially had their philosophy, literally, their love of wisdom (cf. Acts 17:18-31; I Cor. 1:17-31).

But God revealed His true and saving wisdom to the nation of Israel. One section of our Bibles is even referred to as the wisdom literature, from Job to Ecclesiastes. The very subject of Proverbs is wisdom. This is a massive theme also in Ecclesiastes, another book written by Solomon. Job is filled with references to wisdom (e.g., Job 28). The Psalms refer frequently to wisdom and some are even referred to as wisdom Psalms (e.g., Ps. 37; 49; 73).

Among the Old Testament historical books, wisdom looms largest in I Kings and II Chronicles, because they speak at length of Solomon, the wisest man in all the earth (I Kings 4:29-34). Of the sixteen Old Testament writing prophets, Daniel stands out for his wisdom (Dan. 1:20; 2:20-23; 5:11-12; Eze. 28:3). In the New Testament, especially I Corinthians deals with wisdom for, in this inspired epistle, God’s wisdom in Jesus Christ is set forth to a congregation adversely influenced by pagan Greek ideas of wisdom.

Besides Solomon and Daniel, there are many other saints in Scripture who exemplify wisdom, such as Joseph, who became the prime minister of Egypt (Gen. 41:33, 39); Moses, who “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” and to whom God “gave” “wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh” (Acts 7:22, 10); Bezaleel, Aholiab and other wise men and women who made the tabernacle (Ex. 31:2-6; 35:30-36:4); Joshua, who led Israel into the promised land (Deut. 34:9); Stephen the apologist, for the Jews “were not able to resist the wisdom ... by which he spake” (Acts 6:10; cf. v. 3); and Paul, who was “a wise masterbuilder” (I Cor. 3:10).

Wisdom, however, is supremely and infinitely a perfection of God, and so it frequently occurs in doxologies. Glorious creatures in heaven ascribe it to God and the Lamb (Rev. 5:12; 7:12). Repeatedly, Jehovah is praised as the “only wise” God (Rom. 16:27; I Tim. 1:17; Jude 25).

So in the next few issues of the *Covenant Reformed News*, let us learn of God’s wisdom and grow in it ourselves by His grace. “For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it” (Prov. 8:11)!

In grasping the basic idea of wisdom—especially, the wisdom of God—two points

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## Does God Change? (1)

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A reader asks, “How do we explain the ‘change’ from the believer’s formerly being in a state of wrath (Eph. 2:3) to being in a state of grace? Doesn’t this indicate a ‘change’ in God’s relationship to us? One moment, He is only wrathful towards us because we are not yet in Christ and in constant rebellion, but when we are saved we are no longer in that state. Doesn’t that indicate a change in God’s disposition towards men? (And therefore He is not ‘absolutely’ unchangeable but is changeable in one sense?)”

With this question, we are brought face to face with the infinite God and with His perfections. I have a sense, when I read a question such as this, of what Paul meant in Romans 11:33-34: “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! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?”

We are mere creatures created by God, upheld every moment by His power. Not only are we creatures but we are also sinful, with the power of our minds eroded by sin. After 2,000 years of New Testament history, during which the church has diligently searched the Scriptures to learn the truth of God, and written major confessions and profound books of theology, what we know today is not even a thimbleful of knowledge in comparison with all the oceans of the glory of Jehovah. It is my experience—and I think the experience of all God’s people—that I meditate on divine things over and over again to learn a little more about the wonders set forth in the Word. It is like climbing a steep, high mountain and then, having reached the summit and congratulating ourselves in attaining more knowledge of a subject in Scripture, we see before us more mountains to be climbed than we even knew existed. In heaven, we will be going “higher up and further in” in our understanding of God’s truth forever.

We read in several places in the Bible of earthly events that seemingly made God change His mind. One striking example is the statement that Jehovah repented that He had made Saul king (I Sam. 15:11). This seems to mean that, when God brought Saul to the throne of Israel, He thought that this was for the best for the nation. But when Saul sinned, it appears as if God realized that making Saul king was not such a good idea after all, so that He changed His mind. However, a few verses later, Scripture categorically says, “the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent” (29)! Repenting is a human, not a divine, activity!

God declares, most emphatically, “I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal 3:6). God’s unchangeableness is a divine attribute that brings us much comfort. He has promised to be our God and the God of our seed, and He never changes His promise (Ps. 102:27-28).

In attempting to understand this issue, we must remember, first of all, that Scripture, in speaking about God, uses many anthropomorphisms. If this word is unfamiliar to you, it means that human body parts, human emotions and human activities are ascribed to God. The Bible speaks of God’s arm and hand, His heart and mind, His love and hatred,

His compassion and longsuffering, etc. We must not assume, in these expressions, that the Most High has a hand or arm or heart like ours. That would be foolishness. But if God could not be spoken of as having these human characteristics, we would hardly be able to speak of Him at all and Scripture would not be able to reveal to us anything about Him. God’s Word speaks to our limited and finite understanding.

We must be careful that we understand anthropomorphisms properly. The matter is sometimes presented as if our arms and hands, our love and hatred, etc., are the real arms and hands, and the real love and hatred, while God’s arms and hands, His love and hatred, are something like ours. The fact is that it is the other way around: God’s arms and hands are the true arms and hands; ours are merely shadows of His: like His but different, as different as the timeless God is different from mere man who lives his seventy or eighty years and then returns to the dust.

Repentance involves change but in God there is no change at all. What that means for us is that we sometimes become something we were not: we are angry with someone, but then we repent and are angry no more.

I remember well that, in dogmatics or theology class in seminary, we talked at length about this issue with our professor. In our discussions, he made very sure we understood exactly what an anthropomorphism is. He told us that we know almost nothing of God’s unsearchable glories, for He is infinite in all His Being and in all His activity. Our professor often said, not only in class but also in his preaching and congregational prayers, that, when we have said all we know about God, we have only mumbled a bit and stuttered a little, for He is infinitely greater than we can know.

If we asked him how such things could be, he would remind us that God is far, far beyond our puny comprehension and that we must remember too that every thought, every purpose, is eternally in the mind of God.

I can remember the expressions he used: Cain kills Abel eternally in God’s counsel; Christ accomplished His work eternally in the mind of God. From the perspective of God’s counsel, Jesus eternally died on the cross (Rev. 13:8) and eternally rose from the dead. Every thought in the mind of God is intimately related to every other thought so that His counsel is a most perfect plan that reveals all that He is and does. The counsel is eternal and, therefore, unchangeable. It is not governed by, nor subject to, time.

In short, Jehovah is the great, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise God, with whom is absolutely “no variableness” or even a mere “shadow of turning” (James 1:17). He alone can declare of Himself, “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:14). He is always Triune (as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit); always perfectly blessed, rich and full; always sovereign, decreeing and governing all things in heaven, in the earth and in the seas (Ps. 135:6). He is always unchangeable in His manifold virtues, righteous will, glorious purposes and faithful promises in the Lord Jesus. Therefore, we are “not consumed” (Mal. 3:6)!

God willing, part 2 of this article will consider whether or not Jehovah changes in His disposition towards the elect before and after their conversion, and the error that He is “only wrathful” towards us prior to our regeneration.

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