

From Acorn to Oak  
*Who is God, and what is he like? Part 14: Rational and Wise*  
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In the previous article in this series reflecting on who God is, we considered several practical implications that he is all-knowing. Along with that characteristic of his being, are two others especially related to his knowledge as well as to his goodness and perfection: his rationality and his wisdom.

**God is rational.**

God is not only all-knowing; he uses his unlimited knowledge with an unfathomable capacity to reason. Throughout his Word we see many texts where God reasons with his people and where a matter is explained, “For this reason....” See, e.g., “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)

In Exodus 9:16, God instructs Moses what to say to Pharaoh in explanation of what he is doing and why in the process of freeing his people from their slavery to the Egyptian oppressors. He tells Moses to say, “I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

Following the LORD’s message to King David through the prophet Nathan, David was deeply moved. He prayed in humble gratitude for the LORD’s explanation through Nathan of what God has done, was doing, and would be doing. “For this reason You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears.” (2 Samuel 7:22 NASB)

Employing a common literary device in the Old Testament, the judicial court motif, God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, lays out his case against his people Israel who are disobeying his law he gave them, which they promised to follow in their covenant agreement. Israel has disobeyed so flagrantly and consistently, and has failed to live faithfully, justly, and righteously, to accomplish the mission God gave them, that it is time for a wake-up call to warn his people of the judgment that will come soon if they continue to rebel against him. So Isaiah reveals God as saying, “‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD.” (1:18) The original Hebrew word for “reason” is used here in the legal sense in the forensic manner of presenting a court case whereby offenses are presented, with careful dialogue and reasoning about them, and then the rendering of a judgment. Isaiah presents God’s case against Israel, in which he quotes God as inviting his people to engage in the reflection with him and reason together, so they’ll understand what is wrong and make corrections. If they make the corrections they will be blessed greatly; but if they continue to break their covenant promises, they will meet justice that will be severe, for God is not going to sit back and watch his plan of salvation (including for us whom he also has in mind!) be destroyed. That he will not allow. Thankfully!

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, explains the rationale of why his believers in and followers of him should not worry. "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Matthew 6:25 NASB)

Jesus explained to Simon the Pharisee with an exceptionally insightful and wise rationale, why he forgave a sinful woman. At the same time, he skillfully used the occasion to teach a powerful lesson. "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." (Luke 7:47 NASB)

Jesus explains, as recorded in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John, the rationale for why he said that it is necessary for the Father to enable people to believe in him. Then in 6:65 (NASB) John writes, "And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.'"

The apostle Paul explains in Romans 14:9 that the Lordship of Jesus Christ over both the dead and the living arises out of his own death and resurrection.<sup>1</sup> "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." The grammar of the original Greek indicates that Jesus became Lord of both the dead and the living at once; he didn't become Lord of the dead in his death and then Lord of the living in his resurrection. After explaining the Greek grammar of the text, the outstanding New Testament scholar, R.C.H. Lenski writes in his commentary on the text, "'Died and became alive' indicate the momentary acts that constitute death and return to life. The two belong together; Christ became lord by means of both and did not become lord of the dead by his death and lord of the living by his return to life."<sup>2</sup>

Paul elucidates the connection between disobedience to the Lord and the illness and death many were experiencing in the Corinthian church. "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." (1 Corinthians 11:30 NASB) We must remember to use the historic standard principles of Biblical interpretation in our study of Scripture texts; therefore, we cannot use this passage, where Paul is addressing a serious and sinful misuse of the Lord's Supper, to generalize and say that God is judging everyone who is weak and sick because of a sin or sins he or she has committed. This passage does not teach such a concept, nor does any other in the Bible. However, illness, which did not occur until after Adam and Eve sinned, is part of the human condition since that time, and some sins lead to counterproductive effects on the human body and mind and do cause illness and death, but in individual cases when a person becomes ill, there is no Biblical text which teaches a general principle that this individual is being judged by God for a sin he or she has done. It is just part of life in this age; but thanks be to God, a new age is

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<sup>1</sup> Walter W. Wessel, *NIV Study Bible*, "Romans" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), p. 1727.

<sup>2</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *Lenski New Testament Commentary*, "The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," p. 826. WORDsearch.

coming when all who have been redeemed in Christ will live with God in the new heaven and new earth where he “will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

In Galatians 3:9, Paul explicates the rationale for why the Judaizers, former Jews who now believe in Christ, are wrong to insist that the non-Jewish people whom God also wants in his kingdom have to submit to Jewish ceremonial laws that Christ fulfilled and that are therefore not required for all those who believe in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul concludes this part of his reasoning by saying, “So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” It is not works of the law that save someone, because no one other than Jesus Christ can follow it perfectly as God requires. Therefore, it is faith in Christ Jesus that credits the believer with Jesus’ righteousness that saves, just as Abraham’s faith credited him with righteousness. (1 Corinthians 3:6-8; cf. Genesis 15:6) As we read elsewhere, works are important (e.g., Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 2:11-12), but they are important as means of verifying the faith we profess and accomplishing the mission to which God has called us, not as a means of earning our salvation, which the Bible clearly teaches we cannot do, contrary to all other religions.

In his second chapter, Paul explains to the church in Philippi why Jesus was exalted to be in authority over all creation. Citing several reasons, including Christ Jesus’ humility, obedience, and willingness to be a servant rather than to be served, Paul writes, “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,” (Philippians 2:9 NASB)

Paul expressed gratitude and his rationale for it to the church in Thessalonica for their positive reception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NASB)

In Hebrews we read the reason why it was necessary for God’s only begotten Son to take on human form. “For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help [Greek: he takes upon himself] to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore [NIV: For this reason], He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:16-18 NASB)

The Holy Spirit, speaking through the writer to the Hebrews also explains the rationale for God’s great work in and through Christ Jesus, who shed his blood in his once-for-all sacrifice that is the far more effective and all-sufficient sacrifice to redeem us from slavery to sin, and why it is now in effect, far more than the shedding of the blood of animals done in the old covenant as a preparation for understanding the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation in Christ. “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new

covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” (Hebrews 9:15; cf. Leviticus 17:11)

Another reason it is important to read God’s Word carefully is that God’s rationale is often present but not specifically pointed out by using the words, “For this reason...” or similar statements. For example, when God gives the Ten Commandments to Moses, he implies in the preface that the reason for his giving the commandments is to provide another life-saving gift out of his love for his people; that following these commandments will bring huge blessings to them. The commandments are to be seen in the context of God’s great love that freed his people from their slavery and bondage in Egypt. Further, the rationale for obeying God’s commandments, for both the Israelites and for us, is eternal gratitude to God for his unlimited, all-sufficient, exceedingly great, and eternal blessings! Thus, the preamble of the Ten Commandments is “And God spoke all these words: ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me....’” (Exodus 20:1-3. Notice the same words in the second repetition of the law in Deuteronomy 5:6-7.) God is indicating that by following his commandments his people will stay out of slavery. Here is the way to survive and thrive! Think of how great it would be in our country, even in our neighborhood, if everyone lived according to the Ten Commandments. Even if everyone tried! Even if most people tried!

### **God is wise.**

God’s wisdom refers to the use of his knowledge in every realm of the universe to establish what is truly good and to accomplish his purposes. The Psalmist declares, “How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all...” (104:24) To Isaiah God revealed, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Because he is perfect and infinitely wise, we have confidence that his purposes are not only good but the most perfect of all possibilities. His wisdom involves his understanding, intelligence, ability, and skill with which he created the world. (Jeremiah 10:11-12) His wisdom also includes firmness and steadfastness, the root meaning of the Old Testament word referring to this characteristic. In his wisdom he places the parts in proper conjunction with the whole and develops the right means to accomplish the ends he has determined, including incorporating our requests.

God’s wisdom, German theologian Karl Barth wrote, “is that God not only wills but knows what He wills...and...why and wherefore He wills it...and wherefore is then his own meaning, plan and intention. To this extent there is in it light and no darkness.” Barth explains that God’s wisdom revealed in the Bible enables us to “hear the reason,

meaning, purpose and intention of God. When we hear it, we are instructed, enlightened, knowing and wise.”<sup>3</sup>

The wisdom of God is infinitely superior to human wisdom. As such it includes an understandable element of mystery that is unfathomable to us. Revealing some of who he is and what he is like to the prophet, Isaiah, God said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (55:8-11) Quoting the Psalmist, Isaiah, and Job, Paul sang this doxology, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36) Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the Gospel of Jesus Christ saying, “...we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.” (1 Corinthians 2:7)

The wisdom of God that he has in macrocosm is infinitely superior to our human wisdom, the capacity for which God has given us in microcosm but which has been damaged, impaired, and corrupted by sin. Perfect though not unlimited in creation, it is now flawed. Therefore, we can easily understand how God’s wisdom includes an element of mystery that is unfathomable to us. Yet, though unfathomable by limited human intellect, it is neither unreasonable nor nonsensical. This reality is perfectly logical: that which is finite cannot comprehend that which is infinite, nor the limited the unlimited.

Such awareness helps us maintain the respect God alone deserves. This understanding gives us a secure confidence and peace in knowing that God’s way is best, and it motivates us to maintain our trust in and commitment to him, and obedience to his Word and his will.

We see the wisdom of God ultimately in Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:24) Paul writes to the Colossians that they and the church in nearby Laodicea “may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.” (Colossians 2:2-4) It is by Christ that all things were created (Colossians 1:16) and in him that redemption and re-creation are obtained. (1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

Christ is the perfect expression of God’s great love and the only means of making us, who are unworthy, fit for fellowship with God who is holy, holy, holy. Through Christ’s obedience and sacrifice, God maintains his integrity and justice. He credits to believers the righteousness of Christ whereby we become worthy to draw near to him, to serve him, and have eternal joy in his presence. It does not surprise us that the world cannot

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. II. The Doctrine of God, Part 1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 423.

understand the wisdom of this plan, indeed that they consider it foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23), for the new nature provided by the Holy Spirit is required for such understanding. Part of our calling, our mission, is to make known this wisdom of God. (Ephesians 3:10-12)

God's wisdom is related to the other characteristics of his being as well. For example, he has the power to bring about what he wills in his wisdom. Jeremiah proclaims, "God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding." (10:12) Also, his wisdom is linked with his truthfulness: he and his will can always be trusted.

### **Further Benefits for Us**

We can have complete confidence that God's will and his way is best for us. No one has or ever will come up with a better way that hasn't occurred to him.

True wisdom comes from God. Another dimension of God's wisdom, which the world also cannot understand, as well as many Christians, is that human wisdom comes by the fear of God (Proverbs 9:10), a subject we'll undertake in a later segment of this series. I observed this reality and the difference between knowledge and wisdom in a striking manner when I was a graduate assistant in my doctoral program at Michigan State. One day I was reflecting on my work and relationships with the professors and graduate students in the institute where I was a graduate assistant. Some of the professors and grad assistants were believers in Christ, and many were not. I was struck with the difference between the two groups. I was amazed at how some people could be extremely brilliant and knowledgeable but not have much wisdom at all.

We have assurance that when we turn to God for counsel and direction, he'll lead us to that which is true and most helpful. We know it is his leading because the answer we receive is in accord with his Word in the Bible; he does not contradict himself, nor is he a hypocrite who says something and later says or does the opposite.

We always have access to God's wisdom. It won't disappear or be replaced by something more current, applicable, or useful.

God's wisdom enriches our lives immeasurably! The Psalmist prayed, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies...I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes." (119:97-99) As Barth has also written, "The whole art of living and understanding life consists in heeding and accepting divine wisdom and in this way becoming wise...which distinguishes the wise [person] from the fool and...alone promises the possibility of life in this sphere" (p. 430).

When we are faced with a problem, to whom do we turn? We naturally seek help from someone older and wiser than we are. We don't ask those who we perceive are less wise than we. Why not go much further and ask the One who is infinitely wiser than we and

who has said, “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7) The apostle John adds, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” (1 John 5:14-15)

It’s true! I’ve often been faced with either not knowing how to do something or which of more than one option to select regarding a specific matter. When such times occur, I ask the Lord for help, praying a form of this prayer: “Gracious God, you know this question I have before me. I am uncertain what to do. Please grant me your wisdom that I may know what to do and the guidance to do so in the way that will most please you.” Many times I have the answer before I have finished the prayer! An idea comes to mind that I had not thought of prior to that time. On other occasions the answer has come later. Sometimes it comes through other people through whom God works. Yet, it always comes, is always practical, and is always the most helpful approach to take. Truly, we can testify with Isaiah, the Lord is “wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.” (28:29) What wonderful blessings for which to give thanks on Thanksgiving Day and every day!