

A PURSUIT OF WISDOM

The Biblical View of God

Wisdom begins with *God*. Our view of *God* affects our view of *everything* else.

Taking Captives

In our first session we learned that all of us have a worldview, a lens through which we observe, interpret, and understand the world around us. We are in a battle of worldviews. We are bombarded by ideas everywhere we turn – work, school, social media, news, television, movies, sports world, politics, etc. Worldviews have consequences. What we believe affects how we live.

We also learned that God has much to say about how Christians think. He is working in us through the process of sanctification, and one of His works is that of mind renewal (*Rom. 12:2*), developing a Christian worldview or the mind of Christ. Third, we considered Paul’s warnings, that we must learn to take every idea captive (*2 Cor. 10:3-5*), or they will take us captive (*Col. 2:8*). We take ideas captive by filtering them through the Gospel, the Scriptures.

Finally, we discussed the common misconception or lie of the secular-sacred divide, the idea that we live in two realities, that which is on the inside of the church (sacred) and that which is on the outside of the church (secular). As religious people, we’ve been labeled as biased, whereas the irreligious people of the world are viewed as unbiased. This idea is a deception, a scheme of the devil to squelch the Gospel, to keep Christians at bay, from venturing out and fulfilling the Great Commission. This idea is also the enemy’s way of making the church or the Bible irrelevant, as many churches remain silent about the issues of our day.

The Apostle Paul dealt with such lies in Athens, during his second missionary journey (*Acts 17:16-28*). He was in the synagogue and marketplace every day, reasoning with believers and unbelievers, exposing the lies of the culture (idols, false gods) and confronting them with the truths of God and His Gospel. Paul demonstrated for us how to take every thought captive “according to Christ.”

The Pursuit of Wisdom

In our first session, we only looked at what the New Testament had to say about worldview issues. What about the Old Testament? Where is worldview there? Again, the word “worldview” does not appear, but the Old Testament substitutes the words “wisdom” and “understanding.” Developing a biblical worldview is another way of saying that we are going to pursue wisdom.

Throughout the Old Testament, we are encouraged to pursue wisdom. Why? Wisdom is valuable, a blessing and benefit to our lives. Who among us does not wish to be wise? No one worked harder at pursuing wisdom than Solomon. In fact, he wrote two books about wisdom – *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*. Why? Solomon saw great value in possessing wisdom.

“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding, for her profit is better than silver, and her gain better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all who hold her fast.”
Proverbs 3:13-18

Solomon continued.

“The beginning of wisdom is this – acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding. Do not forsake her, and she will guard you. Love her, and she will watch over you. Prize her, and she will exalt you. Wisdom will honor you. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty.” *Proverbs 4:7-9*

“He who finds wisdom finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. Wisdom is protection as money is protection; but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors. Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.” *Proverbs 8:35; Ecclesiastes 7:12, 19*

Why is wisdom so valuable? Before we answer that question, it would be beneficial to know what wisdom is. Noah Webster defined wisdom as “the right use or exercise of knowledge.” He added, wisdom is “the choice of laudable (commendable) ends and the best means to accomplish them... It is the faculty of discerning or judging what is most just, proper, and useful. It is the knowledge and use of what it most conducive to prosperity or happiness” (1828 *Dictionary*). Simply put, wisdom is sorting through all the information available and making a good decision. So then, why is wisdom valuable? Wise decisions often prevent turmoil and heartache, and they make possible the best situation for success.

As a young man, Solomon recognized the value of wisdom. He watched his father, King David, make judgments all day long, knowing just what to do in each situation. Solomon also recognized his deficiency. “I am but a child,” he prayed. “I don’t know how to go out or come in... Give your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, to discern between good and evil” (1 *Kings* 3:7-9). He asked God for wisdom.

Once we understand what wisdom is and that wisdom is valuable to possess, the next step is to pursue wisdom. Wisdom will not come to those who simply wait for it. It is obtained by those who pursue it. We may gain some wisdom from age or experience (*Job* 32:9), but we cannot afford to wait long, for we don’t have much time on earth. We need wisdom now, so what do we do? We know what wisdom is, and we know its value. Now we need to know where to find it.

Before identifying the right place to look for wisdom, let’s first consider the wrong place to look for wisdom. When Eve stole a bite of that forbidden fruit, because she saw that “the tree was desirable to make one wise” (*Gen.* 3:6), her “eyes were opened” to what was good and evil, right and wrong. Though her desire for wisdom was right, the way that she attempted to acquire it was wrong. Sadly, mankind has followed in her footsteps, looking for wisdom in the wrong places.

Throughout time, people have sought for wisdom from philosophers and scientists, from kings and councils, from history and books. All these sources have one underlying problem. They are man-centered, which

means shallow and short-sighted in perspective. While these avenues are great supplements for acquiring wisdom, they cannot serve as the primary source of wisdom. Why not? In the end, they will fall short.

The Wisdom of God

At the end of his life, King David gave his son Solomon some advice. “Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes... that you may succeed in all you do and wherever you turn” (1 *Kings* 2:3). Unlike Eve, David recognized the way to wisdom was not by rebelling against God but by obeying Him. Thus, it makes sense why Solomon wrote, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...” (*Prov.* 1:7; 9:10).

What did Solomon mean by “the fear of the Lord”? The word “fear” here is not referring to being afraid of God (although some people should be), rather it is referring to a reverence or respect for God, His existence, person, power, knowledge, attributes, and character. The more we study who God is, the more we will grow to know Him, what He is like, how He deals with men, and what He has done for us. As a result, we grow in our love, respect, or fear of Him.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” In other words, we cannot be truly wise or make the most sense of the world around us without having knowledge of and a respect and love for God and His words. The Lord is not one of the world’s resources for wisdom; rather He is *the source* for true wisdom. He is the beginning of wisdom, the starting line. Just as in mathematics, we would never understand higher math unless we first understood numbers. Knowing numbers is a prerequisite to understanding the rest of the math world. How can we rightly understand the world unless we first recognize the Creator God and know Him?

Pursuing wisdom from any other source, without God in the equation, is a dead end. We must keep this principle in mind when we read books, hear sermons and speeches, watch the news, or consider the sage advice of a prominent figure. While truths may be gathered from many sources, they must all be weighed against *the Truth*. We cannot filter God’s wisdom through man’s reasoning, but rather we filter man’s reasoning through God’s Word (*Col.* 2:8).

Why is God's wisdom superior to man's wisdom? God is sinless, holy, and moral. His wisdom is not tainted with the fallen and flawed reasoning of limited human minds. His wisdom, then, is unlike human wisdom. "My thoughts are not your thoughts," He says, "nor are your ways My ways..." (*Isa. 55:8, 9; 1 Cor. 1:25; 2:6, 14; 3:19*). Furthermore, God is the Creator and sovereign of the universe, and He is the only all-wise, all-knowing, all-good being in the universe. Thus, it makes sense that He would be the first and best place to turn for wisdom.

When Solomon admitted that he was a child and that he didn't know how to judge God's people, he was making a wise choice, which was to humble himself and recognize the inadequacy of his own wisdom. To pursue the better and higher wisdom of God, we must first devalue our own (*Prov. 3:5-7*). Because Solomon made the wise choice and asked the Lord for an understanding heart, God honored his request (*1 Kings 3:10-12, 28; 4:29; 5:12*).

Notice what is said about Solomon's godly wisdom. "Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt... Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon..." (*4:30, 31, 34; 2 Chron. 9:22, 23*). Not only does the wisdom of God surpass the wisdom of men, but it is uncommon in the world. His wisdom stands out as different and superior. When Nebuchadnezzar spoke with Daniel and his friends, he found them ten times better than anyone from Babylon (*Dan. 1:18-20*). God's wisdom is not just common sense; rather it is uncommon sense. His wisdom is starkly different than the wisdom of the world.

As I've aged and taken on more responsibilities, I am often reminded of my own inadequacies and my need for wisdom. Does God still grant wisdom today? Yes. James wrote, "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" (*James 1:5*).

But how does God give His wisdom? How can we lowly men acquire it? Solomon told us where to find it. "God gives wisdom to men," he wrote. "Out of His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (*Prov. 2:6*). The wisdom of God is revealed in the words of

God. The treasure of wisdom is found in the Scriptures. Read them, study them, and do them, and God will fulfill His promise, "so that we may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (*2 Tim. 3:16, 17*).

Noah Webster defined wisdom as "the right use of knowledge." Solomon wrote, "The *fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom; knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (*Prov. 9:10*). In Solomon's sound words is the principle that *one cannot be truly wise without knowledge of and reverence for the Lord*. Therefore, we must acquire and study as much accurate knowledge of God as possible (theology) to rightly perceive the world around us.

The Knowledge of God

It is through the diligent intake of Scripture that our knowledge of God increases and our opportunity for true wisdom improves. So then, let's add a few words to Webster's definition -- *wisdom is the right use of the knowledge of God*. The more knowledge we acquire of the Lord, the more visible the benefits become in our lives. Here are two examples.

First, the more knowledge we have of God, *the more we will identify truth*. To view the world accurately, we must know the Creator of the world intimately. He knows His world best, so why would we not pursue His wisdom to understand the world rightly?

Second, the more knowledge we have of God, *the more we will tend to think like Him*. While we are finite creatures and will never fully grasp God's infinite will or ways, we can have His mind, the mind of Christ, on the issues of our day. So then, *wisdom is the right use of the knowledge of God*. Let us begin with God. To learn more of God, let us begin with His Word. What does the Bible say about God? How is He described, and how does this knowledge shape our worldview?

A Biblical View of God

The temptation in a series like this one is to dive immediately into other worldviews or cultural issues, but that would be unwise, and here's why. We are all familiar with the analogy of identifying counterfeit money. Agents don't waste their time studying all the different versions of a dollar bill. They first spend their time learning the design and details of a real dollar bill.

Once they grasp the original design, they can easily spot the counterfeits. Likewise, before identifying the lies of the enemy, we must first know the truth.

Therefore, the best place to start a worldview series is with the right view of the world. What is the right view of the world? It is God's view of the world. It is to see the world from His perspective, and we develop a divine perspective by starting with a study of Him (*Prov. 9:10; Ps. 111:10*). *Our view of God affects our view of everything else*. So then, here is a biblical view of God and how theology translates into a divine perspective of the world around us.

God Is

He exists. The Bible does not try to prove that God exists. It simply begins with the assumption that the reader already knows that He exists (*Gen. 1:1; Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:18-20*). Now, there are evidences outside of Scripture that God exists (creation, causation, conscience), which would take up the rest of our time, but we are trying to establish a biblical worldview, and the Bible says God exists, so end of story. To try to understand the world around us, we must begin with God. Any worldview without God in the picture is in error and will produce error.

God Is the Creator

God is the Creator and sustainer of creation. God is distinct from His creation, meaning that He is not a part of creation. Therefore, pantheism is unbiblical. Creation depends on God for its existence (*Gen. 1:1; Acts 17:25, 28; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:3*). His creatures are not independent of Him. They do not self-exist. Any worldview that replaces the Creator with evolutionary processes is mistaken.

God Is Sovereign

Because God created everything, He is *sovereign* over everything. Everything is under His control, His authority (*Ps. 24:1; 115:11; 135:6*). Nothing operates outside of His supervision. If there was one atom or one second outside of His control, then God would not be God. He is either 100% in control of everything, or He is in control of nothing. God's authority extends to all nations, to all people, and to all areas of society.

God Is Purposeful

God is orderly, intentional, and purposeful. He can work all things to fulfill His good purposes, for His glory (*Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:20; Isa. 46:9-11; Jer. 29:11*). We call this attribute God's *providence*. There is no such thing as random, haphazard, accidental, coincidental, or lucky. History has purpose. Life has a purpose and meaning. God has a plan, a good plan, and we are part of that plan. Does that mean that we are robots? No, God has given us freedom of choice, but our choices cannot thwart His will. He uses the choices of all people to accomplish His purposes [use a math trick].

God Is Lawgiver and Judge

Because God is sovereign, He makes the rules for His creation, and all created things must abide by His rules or face the consequences. He is the Judge of all creatures, including human beings (*Josh. 1:8; Isa. 33:22; Jas. 4:12*). God's laws are wise, good, universal, and eternal. Man is not god, and he does not make the rules for creation. For example, gender was God's idea. Man is not free to invent new genders without consequences (i.e., Facebook's 58 genders). Marriage was God's idea. Man is not free to remake marriage into his own image. Sex was God's idea. Man is not free to toy around with sex without consequences.

God Is Good

God is all good, the only moral being in the universe (*Mk. 10:18; Ps. 92:15; Isa. 6:3*). He does not sin and cannot lie. God's rules are the standard for reality, for truth, for right and wrong, for morality, for good. The opposite of God's standard is immorality, evil, or sin. God is all-knowing and all-wise. He determines good and evil, not us. He determines right and wrong, not us.

We could continue with attributes of God all day long, but this is a good start. I recommend Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* for more attributes of God (also the smaller version, *Bible Doctrine*). Our view of God affects our view of everything else. For example, when we understand who God is, then we better understand who man is.

Biblical View of Man

God's creation reveals or reflects His nature and character. The Bible says, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (*Psa. 19:1*). We can learn from creation that God is creative, wise, orderly, detailed, excellent, complex, consistent, and purposeful. We also see signs of God's individuality. There is one God and there is no one like Him. His creation also bears this truth (i.e., continents, snowflakes, etc.), but nothing else demonstrates God's individuality more fully than human beings. They are unique, one-of-a-kind individuals (i.e., eyes, fingerprints, DNA, etc.).

Notice that God made hordes of animals, birds, insects, and fish, but He made just one man (*Gen. 1:20-25; 2:7*). Man is the climax of creation, the best thing that He made. Why? Man bears His likeness. Man was made in His image (*imago dei*). God breathed life into the man and gave him a soul (*Gen. 2:7*). Nothing reflects God's nature and character more than we do.

What are the ramifications of being created in God's image? Because we are image-bearers of God, our lives have value, dignity, meaning, and purpose (His glory). Our lives are precious or sacred. They are not to be snuffed out without consequences (*Gen. 9:5, 6*). We are three-part beings, just like God. We can think, reason, discern, and make moral decisions (will), because God has given us a conscience. We can communicate with ourselves, other people, and God Himself. There is a part of us that will live forever (soul, spirit). Man was given authority over the earth, to rule over it, to subdue it, and to use it for his needs (*Gen. 1:28-30*).

However, because man is the fullest expression of God, he is held to a higher standard than anything else God made. Men are accountable to God for their actions. While man lived in a perfect world for a spell, in his freedom to choose, he chose to rebel against God's command (*Gen. 3*). The result was sin, and the consequences for sin were enormous – immediate shame and loss of innocence, physical suffering and hardships, a curse on creation, and physical and spirit death (*Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:12; 6:23*).

Perhaps the worst consequence of sin was the separation from God, pictured in the removal of Adam and Eve from Eden. They were no longer in fellowship with God. He no longer walked or talked with them in the Garden; instead, He spoke to them from a distance. From that point forward, mankind is fallen, broken, imperfect, and corrupt. Sin was transferred to every human being, every descendant of Adam.

Sin tainted everything we say, do, and think. Mankind attempted to live in sin, but the results were disastrous. Every thought and action were only evil continually. Man even tried to save himself and restore his former greatness (i.e., Tower of Babel, mummification, idols, education, militant discipline). All human efforts fall short of the glory of God (*Rom. 3:10, 23*). We cannot have a right relationship with Him without help. That help must come from outside of us. In our sin, we cannot do anything to perfect ourselves (secular humanism). We cannot create a perfect world, utopia, paradise on this earth apart from God (transhumanism). We cannot have peace. There will always be conflict, war, disagreements, racism, and inequality.

That is the bad news. However, there is good news! God did not leave man to wallow in self-pity. He decided to help us, to redeem us, and to restore us. External solutions will not solve our sin problem. The problem is inside of us. That's where the solution must be. God made a way to be right with Him – His Son Jesus Christ. We could not reach God in our own efforts, so He graciously reached down to us (*Rom. 5:8; 6:23; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:17*). Through Christ's sinless life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, mankind's two biggest enemies – sin and death – have been defeated.

Now, though we still live in a fallen world and creation still lies under its heavy curse, there is hope for mankind. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer bound by shame and suffering. We are no longer afraid of death, for Christ has set us free from all these things. The image that God originally intended for man to reflect at creation is now being restored. He is conforming us into the image of His Son (*Rom. 8:29*), and one day His Son will return to restore all creation to its former glory, and we will live with Him for eternity.

Living with these truths in mind – creation, sin, and salvation – having God’s Spirit in our hearts, and having God’s Word in our hands, we can best understand the world around us. We were created for greatness, but sin has ruined everything. Sin is the source of all our troubles, and Christ is the solution. Not only is salvation in Christ the answer to the sin problem, but so also is the mind of Christ, the wisdom of God’s Word, the solution to the issues of our day.

Christianity makes the most sense of the world, it most closely aligns with reality. Christianity is the most evidentially honest, and it has produced the most individual liberty and wisdom. A people who builds their society on the bedrock of Christianity will be a light to the rest of the world.

Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

So far, we have answered several questions, such as what is wisdom, why should we acquire wisdom, what or who is the source of wisdom, and how do we acquire it? We have also established that *true wisdom and understanding begin with knowledge of God (Prov. 1:7; 9:10)*. However, knowledge of God is only the beginning of wisdom, not the end. Just because we have knowledge of God, does not mean that we will translate that knowledge into wisdom.

Remember Webster’s definition of wisdom is “the right *use* of knowledge.” It is “the choice of laudable ends and the best means to accomplish them... It is the faculty of discerning or judging what is most just, proper, and useful.” In other words, we must *apply* our knowledge of God and His understanding to our lives.

Wisdom leads to action. What we know and believe about God and man becomes evident in our worldview, our lifestyle, our character and conduct, and our words. We will act upon what we know. In other words, *orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy*, meaning that right doctrine leads to right practice. If that is true, then the opposite is also true. Wrong doctrine leads to wrong practice. Our view of God affects our view of everything else.

For example, if we know and believe that God is sovereign, that He is in control of our lives, then we demonstrate that belief by living life free of anxiety or

worry. If we know and believe that God works all things for His good purposes, then we will be faithful to trust Him, even when we experience difficult times. “Knowledge of the Holy One develops understanding,” and that divine understanding is not only reassuring, but it is liberating.

However, if we reject God and refuse to see the world from His perspective, we are foolish, and our hearts will be darkened to the truths of reality and to the Gospel. What would a worldview look like without the God of the Bible in the picture? We will discover the results in the next session.