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The Knowledge and Wisdom of God

Romans 11.33

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Our God Problem

- A. One of my favorite movies is What About Bob? (1991) starring Bill Murray and Richard Dreyfuss
 - 1. Murray stars as Bob Wiley, a quirky, yet troubled, neurotic psychiatric patient
 - a. And Dreyfuss is Dr. Leo Marvin, his psychiatrist
 - 2. In his first therapy session with Dr. Marvin Bob begins by stating, “The simplest way to put it, I have problems”
 - 3. When Dr. Marvin prompts him to explain, Bob has no problem reciting a list maladies that appear to occupy his every waking moment
 - 4. They include
 - a. “I worry about diseases so I have trouble touching things...
 - b. “I have a real big problem moving... when I want to go out [of my apartment] I get weird...
 - c. “I get dizzy spells, nausea, cold sweats, hot sweats, fever blisters, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, blurred vision, involuntary trembling, dead hands, numb lips, fingernail sensitivity, pelvic discomfort...
 - d. “What if my heart stops beating, what if I’m looking for a bathroom and I can’t find it...”
 - 5. And on and on
- B. Now I don’t know if you can relate to any of Bob’s maladies
 - 1. And maybe your list is shorter
 - a. But you probably have your own list
 - 2. Your list is very likely personal
 - a. It may involve physical issues that manifest and increase with our stage of life
 - b. It may involve cognitive issues
 - c. Or relate to burdens in caring for others
 - d. Or regrets about having to have someone else care for you
 - 3. Your list may include financial or material issues
 - a. Do I have the resources to live reasonably in these latter years?
 - b. How do I make decisions about what to do with the wonderful things I’ve accumulated over the years as I contemplate downsizing?

- 4. Your list may include your own activities
 - a. What do I wish to do with my time with the many opportunities for recreation, service, ministry, family, whatever?
 - b. And it's not just about time, is it? I don't have the energy and physical capacity to do what I used to do
- 5. But it's likely your list of problems go beyond yourself
 - a. You may worry about aspects of your community that don't comport with your own wise assessment of the way this little corner of the world ought to work
 - b. Or perhaps there are issues in your extended family that occupy your mind, waking you up in the middle of the night
 - c. Children, grand-children, great grand-children who appear to be making decisions that you can see will lead to their own sets of problems
- 6. Or perhaps it's the world that concerns you
 - a. The disintegration of our moral culture
 - b. The tensions of international diplomacy
 - c. Wars and rumors of wars
 - d. Persecution of Christians around the world
- C. Indeed, our list of our problems may make Bob Wiley's pale in comparison, even if they don't lead us into the therapist's office
- D. But truth be told, none of those things are really our problem
 - 1. Our problem is that we have a **God Problem**
 - 2. And our God problem is so significant, so serious, as to make all our other perceived problems fade into the background
- E. Now, I don't say this to diminish the significance of the things I've listed which so often occupy our minds
 - 1. Those things are real concerns, real issues; real problems
 - 2. But I put it this way because our God problem is the elephant in the room
 - a. It is our overriding problem because every other problem we experience, every other issue that concerns us, would be recast if we would solve our God problem
 - 3. Every other perceived problem would be seen in a completely different light once we solved our God problem
- F. A.W. Tozer:
 - 1. The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshiping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic.
 - 2. This low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking.

3. With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. The words, “Be still, and know that I am God,” mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshiper...
 4. This loss of the concept of majesty has come just when the forces of religion are making dramatic gains and the churches are more prosperous than at any time within the past several hundred years. But the alarming thing is that our gains are mostly external and our losses wholly internal; and since it is the quality of our religion that is affected by internal conditions, it may be that our supposed gains are but losses spread over a wider field.
- G. James Montgomery Boice:
1. ... our addiction to television, entertainment, and the me-centered outlooks of our time has made the situation worse.
 2. No people ever rise higher than their idea of God. Conversely, a loss of the sense of God’s high and awesome character always involves a loss of a people’s moral values and even what we commonly call “humanity.” We are startled by the utter disregard for human life that has overtaken large segments of the United States. But what do we expect to see when a country like ours openly turns its back on God? We deplore the breakdown of moral standards in the church, even among its most visible leaders. But what do we think should happen when we have focused our worship services on ourselves and our own, often trivial, needs rather than on God?
 3. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” But if the full truth be told, many of us hardly think about God at all.
- H. “Many of us hardly think about God at all...”
- I. David Wells, who taught for years at Gordon Conwell Seminary, put the God problem this way in his seminal 1996 book, *No Place for Truth: Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*
1. The disappearance of theology from the life of the Church... is hard to miss today.... It is hard to miss in the evangelical world – in the vacuous worship that is so prevalent, for example, in the shift from God to the self as the central focus of faith, in the psychologized preaching that follows this shift, in the erosion of its conviction, in its strident pragmatism, in its inability to think incisively about the culture, in its reveling in the irrational. And it would have made few of these capitulations to modernity had not its capacity for truth diminished....
 2. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, His grace is too ordinary, His judgment is too benign, His gospel is too easy, and His Christ is too common.

- J. "God rests too inconsequentially upon the church"
- K. We have been engaged in a series entitled The Pure Gospel
1. It is our study on the book of Romans
 - a. That great treatise of the gospel
 - b. The precious gift to the church by the apostle Paul
 2. We've been at it for nearly three years!
 - a. We've taken breaks from it each month with a different series for communion Sundays
 - b. And of course, special seasons like Advent and Holy Week have taken our attention
 3. But Romans has been our meat and potatoes for the better part of our Sunday morning studies
- L. And the last message in Romans, back in November, completed Romans 11
1. Romans 11:33-36 to be exact
 2. That glorious doxology in which Paul's remarkable exposition of the theology of God's plan of redemption
 - a. Which he unfolds in page after page, paragraph after paragraph, for 11 chapters
 - b. Brings him to erupt in an avalanche of praise
 3. Here is Paul's effusive capstone on the edifice of theological temple:
- M. **Romans 11:33-36 (ESV) —**
1. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
 2. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
 3. 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"
 4. 35 "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"
 5. 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things.
 6. To him be glory forever. Amen.
- N. So, having concluded Chapter 11, we move on to Chapter 12
1. But no
 - a. We won't
 - b. We can't
 - c. I can't
 2. I can't move on
 - a. I can't leave these verses in just one message
- O. Why not?
1. Because of our God problem
 2. This text is the solution to our God problem
 - a. The antidote to our God disease
 3. This text is exactly what our limp, weak Christianity needs
 - a. Especially at this time when the world's voice shrieks in a cacophony of distraction and misdirection
- P. Because this text is all about God
1. So, I thought, what better way to begin a new year than by reflecting on the nature and character of the God

- a. Who in His wisdom, His knowledge, His judgments, His ways, and His mind
- b. Has crafted the salvation that you and I treasure
2. So, we're going to settle in this text for this month
 - a. This is **The God We Worship**

II. **The God-ness of God**

- A. The first thing we should reflect on as we consider the God we worship is the God-ness of God
 1. Now, we often speak about the goodness of God
 - a. And that is something we should certainly reflect on
 - b. For God is altogether good
 2. And perhaps when you see that on the screen you think it's a misprint
 - a. That Hawkins meant to say the goodness of God
 3. But no!
 - a. I'm speaking of the God-ness of God!
 - b. What is it that makes God God?
 - c. What are the things about God that so much take for granted, that we hardly ever even think of Him in terms of who He is?
 4. Because we hardly ever think of the God-ness of God, we drift into the kind of "inconsequentiality" of God that Wells talks about
 - a. Or about the "low" and "ignoble" concept of God that Tozer talked about
- B. Our text speaks about several attributes of God that we will be considering during these weeks
 1. It speaks about His wisdom and knowledge
 - a. About His judgments and ways
 - b. And about His mind
 2. Those are what theologians call God's **communicable attributes**
 3. Now, you know about communicable diseases
 - a. Diseases that are caused by germs of one sort or another – bacteria or viruses, for instance –
 - b. And that can be passed on from one to another
 4. Well, these attributes are like that, only the opposite direction
 - a. The direction of welfare and spiritual health
 - b. Instead of disease
 5. God shares His knowledge with those who are made in His image
 - a. God shares His wisdom with those made in His image
 - b. He even shares His mind in some measure to human beings who are made in His image
- C. And yet there are some attributes of God that set God apart, even from those who are made in His image
 1. These are **incommunicable attributes**
 - a. They belong to God's DNA alone (if I can use DNA as a metaphor for characteristics and qualities of God that apply to Him alone)

2. And these incommunicable attributes are what make God God
 - a. They reflect the God-ness of God
- D. **Self-existence**
 1. First, God is self-existent
 - a. He has no origin; we have a beginning – He doesn't
 2. God has always been
 - a. He owes His existence to nobody
 3. Now, the world wants you to believe that you have conjured up God out of your own psychological need
 - a. That you have created Him out of your imagination
 4. Nothing could be further from the truth!
 - a. God has always existed
 5. Understanding the self-existence of God is the first step in solving our God problem
 6. Boice:
 - a. ... this is where our problem in knowing God chiefly lies. The way we learn about something is by breaking it down into its constituent parts and then by tracing those parts to their origin. If we can explain how something came to be, we are well on the way to understanding it. God is not subject to that type of analysis. When we analyze things, those things point back to him as their ultimate and only sufficient cause. But God himself points back to nothing. He is existent in himself alone and therefore ultimately is unknowable. God cannot be analyzed and evaluated as created things can be.
- E. **Self-sufficiency**
 1. The corollary to self-existence is self-sufficiency
 2. Self-sufficiency means that God needs nothing; He is complete in and of Himself
 - a. So, that means He depends on no one and no thing outside of Himself
 3. We're not like that
 - a. We have plenty of needs
 - b. Those needs we perceive to be the source of many of our problems
 - c. We need air to breathe, clothes to wear, shelter to live in, other people to love and who love us
 - d. And without those things, we shrivel and die
 4. But God needs none of those things
 5. Now, many suppose that God does have needs
 - a. That He's lonely, and He needed human beings with whom to have a relationship, to keep Him company
 - b. But that's not the case – God is Triune
 - c. He's Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - d. He's always had perfectly fulfilling relationships within the God-head

- e. Mutually loving, mutually enjoying, mutually communicating
- 6. Others suppose that God needs worshipers
 - a. That too is false
 - b. Boice: But if every individual on the face of the earth became an atheist tomorrow, refusing even to acknowledge God's existence, God would be no more deprived by our atheism than the sun would be deprived of light if all of us should become blind.
 - c. Even in our best moments of worship, we contribute nothing to God's own sense of His self-worth and glory
- 7. Others think that God needs helpers, so that He can get done what He wants to get done
 - a. While God indeed has given us the privilege of joining Him in His grand work of redemption, He doesn't need us!
 - b. He can manage very well without us!
 - c. We are all expendable!
 - d. But at the same time, we are humbled and thrilled that He calls us to join Him in His grand purposes!

F. **Eternality**

- 1. And then, God is eternal
- 2. It is true that He gives us eternal life
 - a. But our lives have not always been; we had a beginning
 - b. And not only that, our eternal life depend entirely upon God's eternal nature
- 3. God's eternity also includes His infinitude – God is **infinite**
 - a. He is without limit
- 4. And not only that, He always will be, as He has always been
 - a. He is **unchangeable**
- 5. We change all the time
 - a. In fact, we must change
 - b. To be the people of God is to be in the process of being transformed into the image and likeness of our Savior
 - c. But God never changes

G. Those are just some of the things that make God God

- 1. They are the God-ness of God
- 2. And unless we stop and reflect on the God-ness of God, we will never solve our God problem

III. **The Uniqueness of God**

- A. These reflections of the God-ness of God speak to the uniqueness of God
- B. Now, the word unique is one of those words in the English language that is mis-used
 - 1. We use the word all the time
 - a. We say, "so-and-so is unique"
 - b. But we don't really mean unique
 - c. We usually mean rare, or unusual

- 2. But unique literally means only one of its kind; unlike anything else
- C. God really is unique
 - 1. He is the only one of His kind
 - a. There is no one else like Him
- D. One of the great testimonies of the uniqueness of God is found in the Bible
 - 1. In the Old Testament book of Micah
- E. The name Micah literally means “Who is like God?”
 - 1. Micah lived in a time in which there was great apostasy
 - a. And his message was largely about judgment
 - 2. But his book is not entirely about judgment
 - a. Here is what he says about God
- F. **Micah 7:18–20 (ESV) —**
 - 1. 18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?
 - 2. He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.
 - 3. 19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot.
 - 4. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.
 - 5. 20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.
- G. If God were like us, He would never have shown mercy
 - 1. Mercy on Israel
 - a. Or mercy on us!
 - 2. Boice:
 - a. If he were like us, even if he showed mercy at one time, he would have ceased to show mercy later, because the people would have exhausted his patience.
 - b. But God is not like us!
 - c. Thank God for that! God is God, and there is no one like him.
 - d. If God were not like that, there would be no hope for any of us. We would all perish. But he is like that, and there is hope. Think about that, and learn to praise him for it.

IV. **The Knowledge of God**

- A. When we turn to our text we begin to see the attributes of God that are communicable – those that He shares with His creatures in some measure
- B. **Romans 11:33 (ESV) —**
 - 1. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!...
 - 2. And while our text begins with wisdom, we will begin with knowledge
 - a. For wisdom depends, in a certain sense, on knowledge
- C. **Its Perfection**
 - 1. And of the many things we can understand about the knowledge of God, perhaps the most significant is its perfection
 - 2. God knows all things
 - a. We know things

- b. We know some things
 - c. We know, perhaps, lots of things
 - d. But if we're honest the more we know, the more we realize we don't know
 - e. Our knowledge is partial
- 3. But our knowledge is also imperfect
 - a. What we think we know may turn out not to be so!
 - b. In fact, it frequently does
 - c. How many times have we discovered that something we took for granted as true for years – even decades – turns out to have been false, or at least, exaggerated or misunderstood
- 4. Arthur W. Pink:
 - a. "God is omniscient. He knows everything; everything possible, everything actual; all events, all creatures, of the past, the present, and the future.
 - b. He is perfectly acquainted with every detail in the life of every being in heaven, in earth, and in hell....
 - c. Nothing escapes his notice, nothing can be hidden from him, nothing is forgotten by him....
 - d. He never errs, never changes, never overlooks anything."
- 5. Tozer:
 - a. God cannot learn. Could God at any time or in any manner receive into his mind knowledge that he did not possess and had not possessed from eternity, he would be imperfect and less than himself. To think of a God who must sit at the feet of a teacher, even though that teacher be an archangel or a seraph, is to think of someone other than the Most High God, maker of heaven and earth...
 - b. God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell....
 - c. Because God knows all things perfectly, he knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything, he is never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything nor (except when drawing men out for their own good) does he seek information or ask questions.

D. **Its Application**

1. Now, how does understanding the perfection of the knowledge of God affect us?
2. Well, it leads us to worship!

- a. Paul: Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
- 3. We can only respond by saying another word: “Awesome”
 - a. Now, “awesome” is another word like “unique” that is misused
 - b. Our younger generation especially are fond of using the word “awesome” to mean “neat” or “cool” or “amazing”
 - c. But truly, “awesome” means to be awestruck by someone
 - d. And who would be stand in awe if not God?
 - e. God is truly awesome! God’s perfect knowledge is truly awesome!
 - f. We can only worship
- 4. But God’s perfect knowledge is also disorienting, even disturbing
 - a. To think that God knows everything perfectly means that He knows us perfectly and completely
 - b. There is nothing about us He doesn’t know
- 5. One of Albert Camus’ atheistic objections about the existence of God centered on His knowledge
 - a. He reasoned that if God knew everything, and knew everything perfectly, He would reduce human beings to mere objects
 - b. His knowledge would be essentially dehumanizing
- 6. But of course, there was a flaw in Camus’ reasoning
 - a. For God’s knowledge is redemptive not destructive
- 7. Adam and Eve hid from God due to their sin
 - a. For them the knowledge of God was a threat
- 8. But when God encountered them, He redeemed them
 - a. He gave them clothes to cover their nakedness
 - b. He promised a redeemer from the seed of the woman
- 9. The gaze of God was a loving gaze
 - a. The perfect knowledge of God, far from destroying Adam and Eve – which it could certainly have
 - b. Was the means of their redemption!
- 10. Another reason why we worship, praising the God of perfect knowledge
 - a. So let the perfect knowledge of God humble us
- 11. And let the perfect knowledge of God comfort us
 - a. God knows us – through and through
 - b. He knows us better than we know ourselves; better than we will ever know ourselves
 - c. And He loves us!
 - d. He loves us because He sent His Son to die in our place, taking the just punishment for all the sins of all those who would ever believe in Him!
 - e. His Son is the promised redeemer, the promised seed of the woman Eve
- 12. So, what a great comfort the knowledge of God is!
- 13. The knowledge of God is the defining characteristic that leads us in our walk with Him

- a. We live for Him knowing that He knows all about who we are, where we're headed, and what we need
- b. We pray knowing that He already knows what we need, and delights to answer the prayers of His people for their ultimate welfare
- c. Sometimes those answers are "no"; but whether "yes," or "no," or "not yet" – they are always for our eternal benefit
- d. Because He knows all things; and He knows the end from the beginning

V. **The Wisdom of God**

- A. Then there is the wisdom of God
 - 1. You can know a lot; but wisdom is yet another thing
- B. **Its Definition**
 - 1. Wisdom is about knowing what to do with knowledge
 - 2. Charles Hodge:
 - a. The selection of proper ends and of proper means for the accomplishment of those ends.
 - 3. Tozer:
 - a. "Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means.
 - b. It sees the end from the beginning, so that there can be no need to guess or conjecture.
 - c. Wisdom sees everything in focus, each in proper relation to all, and is thus able to work toward predestined goals with flawless precision.
- C. **In Salvation**
 - 1. God shows His great wisdom in our salvation – His grand plan of redemption is beyond anything mere humanity could have ever dreamed of!
 - 2. The **justification** of sinners by faith in the sinless One is the result of God's perfect wisdom
 - a. How else could God show Himself "just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus" (**Romans 3:26**)
 - 3. And then God's wisdom is on display in **sanctification**
 - a. We are saved by faith, but the faith we have is through regeneration – being born again – by the Spirit of God
 - b. The Spirit of God who indwells us
 - c. The Holy Spirit
 - 4. How else could we grow into the righteous and holy life we were meant to enjoy without the extraordinary blessing of the presence of the Holy Spirit?
 - a. Activating, motivating, enabling us to live according to His will and purpose?
 - 5. And then to cap it all off with the resurrection from the dead!
 - a. He Himself as the firstfruits!
 - b. But in Him, we are raised to eternal glory

6. What wisdom!
 - a. Our salvation is the perfect means to the perfect end of the glory of God and the eternal good of His people!
- D. **In Human History**
1. Finally, His wisdom in human history is astonishingly wise
 2. We see this especially in Romans 9-11
 - a. In which God shows how the unbelief of His chosen people Israel has led to the faith and redemption of the Gentiles
 - b. And in which the redemption of the Gentiles will lead the Jewish people to finally embrace Messiah Jesus
 3. Boice:
 - a. Who could devise a plan of that scope for world history? We could not do it: We cannot even understand it apart from the biblical revelation, and even that is difficult for us. But it is not beyond “the depth of the riches of the wisdom... of God”

VI. Conclusion

- A. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
 1. In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
 2. Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
 3. Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.
- B. Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
 1. Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
 2. Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above
 3. Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.
- C. To all, life Thou givest, to both great and small;
 1. In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;
 2. We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
 3. And wither and perish—but naught changeth Thee.
- D. Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
 1. Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
 2. All praise we would render; oh, help us to see
 3. 'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee.