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### Discourse On the Wisdom of God

by Stephen Charnock

[Excerpts from “Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God” by Stephen Charnock. Published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids: MI, 1979, in 2 volumes, vol. 1, pp. 585-598.]

**U**se 2. If wisdom be the perfection of the Divine Majesty, how prodigious is the contempt of it in the world? In general, all sin strikes at this attribute, and is in one part or other a degrading of it: the first sin directed its venom against this. As the devils endeavored to equal their Creator in power, so man endeavored to equal him in wisdom: both indeed scorned to be ruled by his order; but man evidently exalted himself against the wisdom of God, and aspired to be a sharer with him in his infinite knowledge; would not let him be the only wise God, but cherished an ambition to be his partner. Just as if a beam were able to imagine it might be as bright as the sun; or a spark fancy it could be as full fraught with heat as the whole element of fire. Man would not submit to the infinite wisdom of God in the prohibition of one single fruit in the garden, when by the right of his sovereign authority, he might have granted him only the use of only the use of one. All presumptuous sins are of this nature; they are, therefore, called reproaches of God (Num. 15:30) “the soul that doth ought presumptuously, reproacheth the Lord.” All reproaches are either for natural, moral, or intellectual defects. All reproaches of God must imply either a weakness or unrighteousness in God: if unrighteousness, his holiness is denied; if weakness, his wisdom is blemished. In general, all sin strikes at this perfection two ways.

1. As it defaceth the wise workmanship of God. Every sin is a deforming and blemishing our own souls, which, as they are the prime creatures in the lower world, so they have greater characters of Divine wisdom in the fabric of them: but this image of God is ruined broken by sin. Though the spoiling of it be a scorn of his holiness, it is also an affront to his wisdom; for though his power was tile cause of the production of so fair a piece, yet his wisdom was the guide of his power, and his holiness the pattern whereby he wrought it. His power effected it, and his holiness was exemplified in it; but his wisdom contrived it. If a man had a curious clock or watch which had cost him many years pains and the strength of

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his skill to frame it; for another, after he had seen and considered it, to trample upon it, and crush it in pieces, would argue a contempt of the artificer's skill. God hath shown infinite art in the creation of man; but sin unbeautifies man, and ravisheth his excellency. It cuts and slasheth the image of God stamped by divine wisdom, as though it were an object only of scorn and contempt. The sinner in every sin acts, as if he intended to put himself in a better posture, and in a fairer dress, than the wisdom of God hath put him in by creation.

2. In the slighting his laws. The laws of God are highly rational; they are drawn from the depths of the Divine understanding, wherein there is no uncleanness, and no defect. As his understanding apprehends all things in their true reason, so his will enjoins all things for worthy and wise ends. His laws are contrived by his wisdom for the happiness of man, whose happiness, and the methods to it, he understands better than men or angels can do. His laws being the orders of the wisest understanding, every breach of his law is a flying in the face of his wisdom. All human laws, though they are enforced by sovereign authority, yet they are, or ought to be, in the composing of them, founded upon reason, and should be particular applications of the law of nature to this or that particular emergency. The laws of God, then, who is *summa ratio*, are the birth of the truest reason; though the reason of every one of them may not be so clear to us. Every law, though it consists in an act of the will, yet doth presuppose an act of the understanding. The act of the Divine understanding in framing the law, must be supposed to precede the act of his will in commanding the observance of that law. So every sin against the law, is not only against the will of God commanding, but the reason of God contriving, and a cleaving to our own reason, rather than the understanding or mind of God: as if God had mistaken in making his law, and we had more understanding to frame a better, and more conducing to our happiness: as if God were not wise enough to govern us, and prescribe what we should do, and what we should avoid; as if he designed not our welfare but our misfortune. Whereas, the precepts of God are not tyrannical edicts, or acts of mere will, but the fruits of counsel; and, therefore, every breach of them is a real declamation against his discretion and judgment, and preferring our own imaginations, or the suggestions of the devil, as our rule, before the results of Divine counsel. While we acknowledge him wise in our opinion, we speak him foolish by our practice; when, instead of being guided by him, we will guide ourselves. No man will question, but it is a controlling Divine wisdom, to make alterations in his precepts; dogmatically, either to add some of their own, or expunge any of his: and is it not a crime of the like reflection to alter them practically? When we will observe one part of the law, and not another part; but pick and choose where we please ourselves, as our humors and carnal interest prompt us; it is to charge that

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part of the law with folly, which we refuse to conform unto. The more cunning any man is in sin, the more his sin is against Divine wisdom, as if he thought to outwit God. He that receives the promises of God, and the “testimony of Christ, sets to his seal, that God is true” (John 3:33). By the like strength of argument, it will undeniably follow, that he that refuseth obedience to his precepts, sets to his seal that God is foolish. Were they not rational, God would not enjoin them; and if they are rational, we are enemies to infinite wisdom, by not complying with them. If infinite prudence hath made the law, why is not every part of it observed; if it were not made with the best wisdom, why is any part of it observed? If the defacing of his image be any sin, as being a defaming his wisdom in creation, the breaking his law is no less a sin, as being a disgracing his wisdom in his administration. ‘Tis upon this account, likely, that the Scripture so often counts sinners fools, since it is certainly inexcusable folly to contradict undeniable and infallible Wisdom; yet this is done in the least sin: and as he that breaks one little of the law, is deservedly accounted guilty of the breach of the whole (James 2:10), so he that despiseth the least stamp of wisdom in the minutes” part of the law, is deservedly counted as a contemner of it, in the frame of they whole statute book. But, in particular, the wisdom of God is affronted and invaded.

1. By introducing new rules and modes of worship, different from Divine institutions. Is not this a manifest reflection on this perfection of God, as though he had not been wise enough to provide for his own honor, and model his own service, but stood in need of our directions, and the caprices of our brains? Some have observed, that it is a greater sin in worship to do that we should not, than to omit what we should perform. The one seems to be out of weakness, because of the high exactness of the law; and the other out of impudence, accusing the wisdom of God of imperfection, and controlling it in its institutions. At best, it seems to be an imputation of human bashfulness to the Supreme Sovereign; as if he had been ashamed to prescribe all that was necessary to his own honor, but had left something to the ingenuity and gratitude of men. Man has, ever since the foolish conceit of his old ancestor Adam, presumed he could be as wise as God; and if he who was created upright entertained such conceits, much more doth man now, under a mass of corruption, so capable to foment them. This hath been the continual practice of men; not so much to reject what once they had received as Divine, but add something of their own inventions to it. The heathens renounced not the sacrificing of beasts for the expiation of their offenses(which the old world had received by tradition from Adam, and the new world, after the deluge, from Noah). But they had blended that tradition with rites of their own, and offered creatures unclean in themselves, and not fit to be offered to an infinitely pure Being; for the distinction of clean and unclean was as ancient as Noah (Gen.

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8:20), yea, before (Gen. 7:2). So the Jews did not discard what they had received from God, as circumcision, the Passover, and sacrifices; but they would mix a heap of heathenish rites with the ceremonies of Divine ordination, and practice things which he had not commanded, as well as things which he had enjoined them. And, therefore, it is observable, that when God taxeth them with sin, he doth not say, they brought in those things which he had forbidden into his worship; but those things which he had not commanded, and had given no order for, to intimate, that they were not to move a step without his rule (Jer. 7:31): “They have built the high palaces of Tophet, which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart;” and (Levit. 10:1); Nadab’s and Abihu’s strange fire was not commanded; so charging them with impudence and rashness in adding something of their own, after he had revealed to them the manner of his service, as if they were as wise as God. So loath is man to acknowledge the supremacy of Divine understanding, and be sensible of his own ignorance. So after the divulging of the gospel, the corrupters of religion did not fling off, but preserved the institutions of God, but painted and patched them up with pagan ceremonies; imposed their own dreams with as much force as the revelations of God. Thus hath the papacy turned the simplicity of the gospel into pagan pomp, and religion into politics; and revived the ceremonial law, and raked some limbs of it out of the grave, after the wisdom of God had rung her knell, and honorably interred her; and sheltered the heathenish superstitions in Christian temples, after the power of the gospel had chased the devils, with all their trumpery, from their ancient habitations. Whence should this proceed, but from a partial atheism, and a mean deceit of the Divine wisdom? As though God had not understanding enough to prescribe the form of his own worship; and not wisdom enough to support it, without the crutches of human prudence. Human prudence is too low to parallel Divine wisdom; it is an incompetent judge of what is fit for an infinite Majesty. It is sufficiently seen in the ridiculous and senseless rights among the heathens; and the cruel and devilish ones fetched from them by the Jews. What work will human wisdom make with divine worship, when it will presume to be the director of it, as a mate with the wisdom of God! Hence will it take its measures, but from sense, humor and fancy? As though what is graceful and comely to a depraved reason, were as beautiful to an unspotted and Infinite Mind. Do not such tell the world, that they were of God’s cabinet council, since they will take upon them to judge, as well as God, what is well-pleasing to him? Where will it have the humility to stop, if it hath the presumption to add any one thing to revealed modes of worship? How did God tax the Israelites with making idols “according to their own understanding” (Hos. 13:2)! Imagining their own understandings to be of a finer make, and a perfecter mould than their Creator’s; and that they had fetched

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more light from the chaos of their own brains, than God had from eternity in his own nature. How slight will the excuse be, God hath not forbidden this, or that, when God shall silence men with the question, Where, or when did I command this, or that? There was no addition to be made under the law to the meanest instrument God had appointed in his service. The sacred perfume was not to have one ingredient more put into it, than what God had prescribed in the composition; nor was any man upon pain of death to imitate it nor would God endure that sacrifices should be consumed with any other fire than that which came down from heaven. So tender is God of any invasions of his wisdom and authority. In all things of this nature, whatsoever voluntary humility and respect to God they may be disguised with, there is a swelling of the fleshly mind against infinite understanding, which the apostle nauseates (Col. 2:18). Such mixtures have not been blessed by God: as God never prospered the mixtures of several kinds of creatures, to form and multiply a new species, as being a dissatisfaction with his wisdom as Creator; so he doth not prosper mixtures in worship, as being a conspiracy against his wisdom as a Lawgiver. The destruction of the Jews was judged by some of their doctors to be, for preferring human traditions before the written word; which they ground on (Isaiah 29:13): “Their fear for me was taught by the precepts of men.” The injunctions of men were the rule of their worship, and not the prescripts of my law. To conclude, such as make alterations in religion, different from the first institution, are intolerable busy bodies, that will not let God alone with his own affairs. Vain man would be wiser than his Maker, and be dabbling in that which is His sole prerogative.

2. In neglecting means instituted by God. When men have risings of heart against God’s ordinances, “they reject the counsel of the Lord against themselves,” or, in themselves (Luke 7:30), *ἠθέτησαν*. They disannulled the wisdom of God, the spring of his ordinances. All neglects are disregards of Divine prescriptions, as impertinent and unavailing to that end for which they were appointed, as not being suited to the common dictates of reason; sometimes out of a voluntary humility, such as Peter’s was, when he denied Christ’s condescension to wash his feet (John 13:8), and thereby judged of the comeliness of his Master’s intention and action. Such as continually neglect the great institution of the Lord’s supper, out of a sense of unworthiness, are in the same rank with Peter, and do, as well as he, fall under the blame and reproof of Christ. Men would be saved, and use the means, but either means of their own appointment, or not at all the means of God’s ordering. They would have God’s wisdom and will condescend to theirs, and not theirs conformed to God’s; as if our blind judgments were fittest to make the election of the paths to happiness. Like Naaman, who, when he was ordered by the prophet, for the cure of his leprosy, to “wash seven times in Jordan,” would

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be the prophet's director, and have him touch him with his hand; as if a patient, sick of a desperate disease, should prescribe to his skillful physician what remedies he should order for, and make his own infirm reason, or his taste and palate, the rule, rather than the physician's skill. Men's inquiries are, "Who will show us any good?" They rather fasten upon any means than that which God hath ordained. We invert the order Divine wisdom hath established, when we would have God save us in our own way, not in his. It is the same thing as if we would have God nourish us without bread, and cure our disease without medicines, and increase our wealth without our industry, and cherish our souls without his word and ordinances. It is to demand of him an alteration of his methods, and a separation of that which he hath by his eternal judgment joined together. Therefore for a man to pray to God to save him when he will not use the means he hath appointed for salvation, when he slights the word, which is the instrument of salvation, is a contempt of the wisdom of Divine institutions. Also in omissions of prayer. When we consult not with God upon urgent occasions, we trust more to our own wisdom than God's, and imply that we stand not in need of his conduct, but have ability to direct ourselves, and accomplish our ends without his guidance. Not seeking God is, by the prophet, taxed to be a reflection upon this perfection of God (Isa. 31:1,2): "They look not to the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord" &c. And the like charge he brings against them (Hos. 8:9): "They are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself, not consulting God."

3. In censuring God's relations and actions, if they be not according to our schemes: when we will not submit to his plain will without penetrating into the unrevealed reason of it, nor adore his counsels without controlling them, as if we could correct both law and gospel, and frame a better method of redemption than that of God's contriving. Thus men slighted the wisdom of God in the gospel, because it did not agree with that philosophical wisdom and reason they had sucked in by education from their masters (I Cor. 1:21, 22), contrary to their practice in their superstitious worship, where the oracles they thought divine were entertained with reverence, not with dispute, and though ambiguous, were not counted ridiculous by the worshipper. How foolish is man in this wherein he would be accounted wise! Adam, in innocence, was unfit to control the doctrine of God when the eye of his reason was clear; and much more are we, since the depravation of our natures. The revelations of God tower above reason in its much more above reason in its mud and earthiness. The rays of Divine wisdom are too bright for our human understandings, much more for our sinful understandings. It is base to set up reason, a finite principle, against an infinite wisdom; much baser to set up a depraved and purblind reason against an all-seeing and holy wisdom. If we would have a reason for all that God speaks, and all that God acts, our wisdom

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must become infinite as his, or his wisdom become finite as ours. All the censures of God's revelations arise from some biased opinions, or traditional maxims, that have enthroned themselves in our minds, which are made the standard whereby to judge the things of God, and receive or reject them as they agree with, or dissent from, those principles (Col. 2:8). Hence it was that the philosophers, in the earliest times of the church, were the greatest enemies to the gospel: and the contempt of Divine wisdom, in making reason the supreme judge of Divine revelation, was the fruitful mother of the heresies in all ages springing up in the church, and especially of that Socinianism, that daily insinuates itself into the minds of men. This is a wrong to the wisdom of God. He that censures the words or actions of another, implies that he is, in his censure, wiser than the person censured by him. It is as insupportable to determine the truth of God's plain dictates by our reason, as it is to measure the suitableness or unsuitableness of his actions by the humor of our will. We may sooner think to span the sun, or grasp a star, or see a gnat swallow a Leviathan, than fully understand the debates of eternity. To this we may refer too curious inquiries into Divine methods, and "intruding into those things which are not revealed" (Col. 2:18). It is to affect a wisdom equal with God, and an ambition to be of his cabinet council. We are not content to be creatures, that is, to be every way below God; below him in wisdom, as well as power.

4. In prescribing God's method of acting. When we pray for a thing without a due submission to God's will; as if we were his counselors, yea his tutors, and not his subjects, and God were bound to follow our humors, and be swayed according to the judgment of our ignorance; when we would have such a mercy which God thinks not fit to give, or have it in this method, which God designs to convey through another channel. Thus we would have the only wise God take his measures from our passions; such a controlling of God was Jonah's anger about a gourd (chap. 4:1): "It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." We would direct Him how to dispose of us; as though he, that had infinite wisdom to contrive and rear the excellent fabric of the world, had not wisdom enough, without our discretions, to place us in a sphere proper for his own ends, and the use he intends us in the universe. All the speeches of men (would I had been in such an office, had such charge; would I had such a mercy, in such a method, or by such instruments,) are entrenchments upon God's wise disposal of affairs. This imposing upon God is a hellish disposition, and in hell we find it. The rich man in hell, that pretends some charity for his brethren on earth, would direct God a way to prevent their ruin, by sending one from the dead to school them, as a more effectual means than "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:29,30). It is a temper also to be found on earth; what else was the language of Saul's saving the Amalekites' cattle against the plain command of God (1 Sam.

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15:15)? As if God in his fury had overshot himself and overlooked his altar, in depriving it of so great a booty for its service; as if it were an unwise thing in God, to lose the prey of so many stately cattle, that might make the altar smoke with their entrails, and serve to expiate the sins of the people; and therefore he would rectify that which he thought to be an oversight in God, and so magnifies his own prudence and discretion above the Divine. We will not let God act as he thinks fit, but will be directing him, and “teaching him knowledge” (Job. 21:22.) As if God were a statue, an idol, that had eyes and saw not, hands, but acted not; and could be turned as an image may be, to what quarter of the heaven we please ourselves. The wisdom of God is unbiassed; the orders nothing but what is fittest for his end, and we would have our shallow brains the bias of God’s acting. And will not God resent such an indignity, as a reflection upon his wisdom as well as authority, when we intimate that we have better heads than he, and that he comes short of us in understanding?

5. In murmuring and impatience. One demands a reason, why he hath this or that cross? Why he hath been deprived of such a comfort, lost such a venture, languisheth under such a sickness, is tormented with such pains, oppressed by tyrannical neighbors, is unsuccessful in such designs? In these, and such like, the wisdom of God is questioned and defamed. All impatience is a suspicion, if not a condemnation of the prudence of God’s methods, and would make human feebleness and folly the rule of God’s dealing with his creatures. This is a presuming to instruct God, and a reproving him for unreasonableness in his proceedings, when his dealings with us do not exactly answer our fancies and wishes; as if God, who made the world in wisdom, lacked skill for the management of his creatures in it (Job 40:2): “Shall he that contends with the Almighty, instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.” We that are not wise enough to know ourselves, and what is needful for us; presume to have wit enough to guide God in his dealing with us. The wisdom of God rendered Job more useful to the world by his afflictions, in making him a pattern of patience, than if he had continued him in a confluence of all worldly comforts, wherein he had been beneficial only in communicating his morsels to his poor neighbors. All murmuring is a fastening error upon unerring Wisdom.

6. In pride and haughtiness of spirit. No proud man, but sets his heart “as the heart of God” (Ezek. 28:2,3). The wisdom of God hath given to men divers offices, set them in divers places; some have more honorable charges, some meaner. Not to give that respect their offices and places call for, is to quarrel with the wisdom of God, and overturn the rank and order wherein he hath placed things. It is unfit we should affront God in the disposal of his creatures, and

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insinuate to him by our behaviour, that he would have done more wisely in placing another, and that he hath done foolishly in placing this or that man in such a charge. Sometimes men are unworthy the place they fill; they may be set there in judgment to themselves and others: but the wisdom of God in his management of things, is to be honored and regarded. It is an infringing the wisdom of God, when we have a vain opinion of ourselves, and are blind to others. When we think ourselves monarchs, and treat others as worms or flies in comparison of us. He who would reduce all things to his own honor, perverts the order of the world, and would constitute another order than what the wisdom of God hath established; and move them to an end contrary to the intention of God, and charges God with want of discretion and skill.

7. Distrust of God's promise is an impeachment of his wisdom. A secret reviling of it, as if he had not taken due consideration before he past his word; or a suspicion of his power, as if he could not accomplish his word. We trust the physician's skill with our bodies, and the lawyer's counsel with our estates; but are loath to rely upon God for the concerns of our lives. If he be wise to dispose of us, why do we distrust him? If we distrust him, why do we embrace an opinion of wisdom? Unbelief also is a contradiction to the wisdom of God in the gospel, &c., but that I have already handled in a discourse of the nature of unbelief.

*Use 3.* Of comfort. God hath an infinite wisdom, to conduct us in our affairs, rectify us in our mistakes, and assist us in our straits. It is an inestimable privilege to have a God in covenant with us; so wise, to communicate all good, to prevent all evil; who hath infinite ways to bring to pass his gracious intentions towards us. "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33)! His judgments or decrees are incomprehensibly wise, and the ways of effecting them are as wise as his resolves effected by them. We can as little search into his methods of acting, as we can into his wisdom of resolving; both his judgments and ways are unsearchable.

1. Comfort in all straits and afflictions. There is a wisdom in inflicting them, and a wisdom in removing them. He is wise to suit his medicines to the humor of our disease, though he doth not to the humor of our wills: he cannot mistake the nature of our distemper, or the virtue of his own medicine. Like a skilful physician, he sometimes prescribes bitter potions, and sometimes cheering cordials, according to the strength of the malady, and necessity of the patient, to reduce him to health. As nothing comes from him, but what is for our good, so nothing is acted by him in a rash and reckless way. His wisdom is as infinite as his goodness; and as exact in managing, as his goodness is plentiful in streaming out to us. He understands our griefs, weighs our necessities, and no remedies are

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beyond the reach of his contrivance. When our feeble wits are bewildered in a maze, and at the end of their line for a rescue, the remedies unknown to us are not unknown to God. When we know not how to prevent a danger, the wise God hath a thousand blocks to lay in the way; when we know not how to free ourselves from an oppressive evil, he hath a thousand ways of relief. He knows how to time our crosses, and his own blessings. The heart of a wise God, as well as the heart of a wise man, discerns both time and judgment (Eccles. viii.5). There is as much judgment in sending them, as judgment in removing them. How comfortable is it to think, that our distresses, as well as our deliverances, are the fruits of infinite wisdom! Nothing is done by him too soon or too slow; but in the true point of time, with all Its due circumstances, most conveniently for his glory and our good. How wise is God to bring the glory of our salvation out of the depths of a seeming ruin and make the evils of affliction subservient to the good of the afflicted.

2. In temptations, his wisdom is no less employed in permitting them, than in bringing them to a good issue. His wisdom in leading our Savior to be tempted of the devil, was to fit him for our succor; and his wisdom in suffering us to be tempted, is to fit us for his own service, and our salvation. He makes a thorn in the flesh to be an occasion of a refreshing grace to the spirit, and brings forth cordial grapes from those pricking brambles, and magnifies his grace by his wisdom, from the deepest subtilties of hell. Let Satan's intentions be what they will, he can be for him at every turn, to outwit him in his stratagems, to baffle him in his enterprises; to make him instrumental for our good, where he designs nothing but our hurt. The Lord hath his methods of deliverance from him (2 Pet. 2:9) "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation."

3. In denials, or delays of answers of prayer. He is gracious to hear; but he is wise to answer in an acceptable time, and succor us in a day proper for our salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). We have partial affections to ourselves, ignorance is natural to us (Rom. 8:26). We ask we know not what, because we ask out of ignorance. God grants what he knows, what is fit for him to do, and fit for us to receive; and the exact season wherein it is fittest for him to bestow a mercy. As God would have us bring forth our fruit in season, so he will send forth his mercies in season. He is wise to suit his remedy to our condition, to time it so, as that we shall have an evident prospect of his wisdom in it; that more of Divine skill, and less of human, may appear in the issue. He is ready at our call; but he will not answer, till he see the season fit to reach out his hand. He is wise to prove our faith, to humble us under the sense of our own unworthiness, to whet our affections, to set a better estimate on the blessings prayed for, and that he may double the blessing, as we do our devotion: but when his wisdom sees us fit to receive his goodness, he

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grants what we stand in need of. He is wise to choose the fittest time, and faithful to give the best covenant mercy.

4. In all evils threatened to the church by her enemies. He hath knowledge to foresee them, and wisdom to disappoint them (Job. 5:13); “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.” The church hath the wisdom of God, to enter the lists with the policy of hell. He defeated the serpent in the first net he laid, and brought a glorious salvation out of hell’s rubbish, and is yet as skilful to disappoint the after-game of the serpentine brood. The policy of hell, and the subtilty of the world, are no better than folly with God (1 Cor. 3:19). All creatures are fools, as creatures, in comparison with the Creator. The angels he chargeth with folly, much more us sinners. Depraved understandings are not fit mates for a pure and unblemished mind. Pharaoh, with his wisdom, finds a grave in the sea; and Achitophel’s plots are finished in his own murder. He breaks the enemies by his power, and orders them by his skill to be a feast to his people (Ps 74:14); “Thou breakest the head of the leviathan, and gavest him to be meat to the people in the wilderness.” The spoils of the Egyptians carcasses, cast upon the shore, served the Israelites’ necessities (or were as meat to them); as being a deliverance the church might feed upon in all ages, in a wilderness condition, to maintain their faith, the vital principle of the soul. There is a wisdom superior to the subtilties of men, which laughs at their follies, and “hath them in derision” (Ps. 2:4). “There is no wisdom or counsel against the Lord” (Prov. 21:30). You never question the wisdom of an artist to use his file, when he takes it into his hand. Wicked instruments are God’s axes and files; let him alone, he hath skill enough to manage them: God hath too much affection to destroy his people, and wisdom enough to beautify them by the worst tools he uses. He can make all things conspire to a perfect harmony for his own ends, and his people’s good, when they see no way to escape a danger feared, or attain a blessing wanted.

Use 4:. For Exhortation. 1. Meditate on the wisdom of God in creation and government. How little do we think of God when we behold his works! Our sense dwells upon the surface of plants and animals, beholds the variety of their colors, and the progress in their motion; our reason studies the qualities of them; our spirits seldom take a flight to the Divine wisdom which framed them. Our senses engross our minds from God, that we scarce have a thought free to bestow upon the Maker of them, but only on the by. The constancy of seeing things that are common stifles our admiration of God, due upon the sight of them. How seldom do we raise our souls as far as heaven, in our views of the order of the world, the revolutions of the seasons, the nature of the creatures that are common among us

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and the mutual assistance they give to each other! Since God hath manifested himself in them to neglect the consideration of them is to neglect the manifestation of God, and the way whereby he hath transmitted something of his perfections to our understanding. It renders men inexcusably guilty of not glorifying God (Rom. 1:19,20). We can never neglect the meditation of the creatures, without a blemish cast upon the Creator's wisdom. As every river can conduct us to the sea, so every creature points us to an ocean of infinite wisdom. Not the minutest of them, but rich tracts of this may be observed in them, and a due sense of God result from them. They are exposed to our view, that something of God may be lodged in our minds; that, as our bodies extract their quintessence for our nourishment, so our minds may extract a quintessence for the Maker's praise. Though God is principally to be praised, in and for Christ, yet, as grace doth not erase out the law of nature, so the operations of grace put not the dictates of nature to silence, nor suspend the homage due to God upon our inspection of his works. God hath given full testimonies of this perfection in the heavenly bodies, dispersing their light, and distributing their influences to every part of the world; in framing men into societies, giving them various dispositions for the preservation of governments; making some wise for counsel, others martial for action; changing old empires, and raising new. Which way soever we cut our eyes, we shall find frequent occasions to cry out, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:33)! To this purpose, we must not only look upon the bulk and outside of his works, but consider from what principles they were raised, in what order disposed, and the exact symmetry and proportion of their arts. When a man comes into a city or temple, and only considers the surface of the buildings, they will amaze his sense, but not better his understanding, unless he considers the methods of the work, and the art whereby it was erected.

(1.) This was an end for which they were created. God did not make the world for man's use only, but chiefly for his own glory; for man's use to enjoy his creatures, and for his own glory to acknowledged in his creatures, that we may consider his art in framing them, and his skill in disposing them, and not only gaze upon the glass without considering the image it represents, and acquainting ourselves whose image it is. The creatures were not made for themselves, but for the service of the Creator, and the service of man. Man was not made for himself, but for the service of the Lord that created him. He is to consider the beauty of the creation, that he may thereby glorify the Creator. He knows in art their excellency; the creatures themselves. do not. If, therefore, man be idle and unobservant of them, he deprives God of the glory of his wisdom, which he should have by his creatures. The inferior creatures themselves cannot observe it. If man regard it not,

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what becomes of it? His glory can only be handed to him by man. The other creatures cannot be active instruments of his glory, because they know not themselves, and therefore cannot render him an active praise. Man is, therefore, bound to praise God for himself, and for all his creatures, because he only knows himself, and the perfections of the creatures, and the Author both of himself and them. God created such variety, to make a report of himself to us; we are to receive the report, and to reflect it back to him. To what purpose did he make so many things, not necessary, for the support and pleasure of our lives, but that we should behold him in them, as well as in the other? We cannot behold the wisdom of God in his own essence, and eternal ideas, but by the reflection of it in the creatures: as we cannot steadily behold the sun with our eye, but either through a glass, or by reflection of the image of it in the water. God would have us meditate on his perfections; he therefore chose the same day wherein he reviewed his work and rested from it, to be celebrated by man for the contemplation of him (Gen. 2:2,3), that we should follow his example, and rejoice, as himself did, in the frequent reviews of his wisdom and goodness in them. In vain would the creatures afford matter for this study, if they were wholly neglected. God offers something to our consideration in every creature. Shall the beams of God shine round about us, and strike our eyes, and not affect our minds? Shall we be like ignorant children, that view the pictures, or point to the letters in a book, without any sense and meaning? How shall God have the homage due to him from his works, if man hath no care to observe them? The 148th Psalm is an exhortation to this. The view of them should often extract from us a wonder of the like nature of that of David's (Ps. 104:24): "O Lord, how wonderful are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all!" The world was not created to be forgotten, nor man created to be unobservant of it.

(2.) If we observe not the wisdom of God in the views of the creatures, we do no more than brutes. To look upon the works of God in the world, is no higher an act than mere animals perform. The glories of heaven, and beauties of the earth, are visible to the sense of beasts and birds. A brute beholds the motion of a man, as it may see the wheels of a clock, but understands not the inward springs of motion; the end for which we move, or the soul that acts us in our motion; much less that Invisible Power which presides over the creatures, and conducts their motion. If man do no more than this, he goes not a step beyond a brutish nature, and may very well acknowledge himself with Asaph, a foolish and ignorant beast before God (Ps. 73:22). The world is viewed by beasts, but the Author of it to be contemplated by man. Since we are in a higher rank than beasts, we owe a greater debt than beasts; not only to enjoy the creatures, as they do, but behold God in the creatures, which they cannot do. The contemplation of the

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reason of God in his works, is a noble and suitable employment for a rational creature: we have not only sense to perceive them, but souls to mind them. The soul is not to be without its operation: where the operation of sense ends, the work of the soul ought to begin. We travel over them by our senses, as brutes; but we must pierce further by our understandings, as men, and perceive and praise Him that lies invisible in his visible manufactures. Our senses are given us as servants to the soul, and our souls bestowed upon us for the knowledge and praise of their and our common Creator.

(3.) This would be a means to increase our humility. We should then relax our wings, and veil our sails, and acknowledge our own wisdom to be as a drop to the ocean, and a shadow to the sun. We should have mean thoughts of the nothingness of our reason, when we consider the sublimity of the Divine wisdom. Who can seriously consider the sparks of infinite skill in the creature, without falling down at the feet of the Divine Majesty, and acknowledge himself a dark and foolish creature (Ps. 8:4, 5)? When the Psalmist considered the heavens, the moon, and stars, and God's ordination and disposal of them, the use that results from it is, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" We should no more think to equal him in prudence, or set up the spark of our reason to vie with the sun. Our reason would more willingly submit to the revelation, when the characters of Divine wisdom are stamped upon it, when we find his wisdom in creation incomprehensible to us.

(4.) It would help us in our acknowledgments of God, for his goodness to us. When we behold the wisdom of God in creatures below us, and how ignorant they are of what they possess, it will cause us to reflect upon the deeper impressions of wisdom in the frame of our own bodies and souls, an excellency far superior to theirs; this would make us admire the magnificence of his wisdom advancing us in dignity and goodness, sound forth his praise for a above other works of his hands, and stamping on us, by infinite art, a nobler image of himself. And by such a comparison of ourselves with the creatures below us, we should be induced to act excellently, according to the nature of our souls; not brutishly, according to the nature of the creatures God hath put under our feet.

(5.) By the contemplation of the creatures, we may receive some assistance in clearing our knowledge in the wisdom of redemption. Though they cannot of themselves inform us of it, yet since God hath revealed his redeeming grace, they can illustrate some particulars of it to us. Hence the Scripture makes use of the creatures, to set forth things of a higher orb to us: our Saviour is called a Sun, a Vine, and a Lion; the Spirit likened to a dove, fire, and water. The union of Christ and his church, is set forth by the marriage union of Adam and Eve. God hath

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placed in corporeal things the images of spiritual, and wrapped up in his creating wisdom the representations of his redeeming grace: whence some call the creatures, natural types of what was to be transacted in a new formation of the world, and allusions to what God intended in and by Christ.

(6.) The meditation of God's wisdom in the creatures is, in part, a beginning of heaven upon earth. No doubt but there will be a perfect opening of the model of Divine wisdom. Heaven is for making apparent what is now obscure, and a full revealing of what seems at present intricate (Ps. 36:9): "In his light shall we see light:" all the light in creation, government, and redemption. The wisdom of God in the new heavens, and the new earth, would be to little purpose if that also were not to be regarded by the inhabitants of them. As the saints are to be restored to the state of Adam, and; so they are to be restored to the employment of Adam, and higher: but his employment was, to behold God in the creatures. The world was so soon depraved, that God hid but little joy in, and man but little knowledge of his works. And since the wisdom of God in creation is so little seen by our ignorance here, would not God lose much of the glory of it, if the glorified souls should lose the understanding of it above? When their darkness shall be expelled, and their advantages improved; when the eye that Adam lost shall be fully restored, and with a greater clearness; when the creature shall be restored to its true end, and reason to its true perfection (Rom. 8:21, 22); when the fountains of the depths of nature and government shall be opened, knowledge shall increase, and according to the increase of our knowledge, shall the admiration of Divine wisdom increase also. The wisdom of God in creation was not surely intended to lie wholly unobserved in the greatest part of it; but since there was so little time for the full observation of it, there will be a time wherein the wisdom of God shall enjoy a resurrection, and be fully contemplated by his understanding and glorified creature.

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