

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine God's communicable attributes. Dr. Spencer, we were discussing God's wisdom last time, what else would you like to say about it?

Dr. Spencer: I'd like to begin today by reading a quote from Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*. He has a wonderful statement in his section on the wisdom of God.

Marc Roby: Please proceed.

Dr. Spencer: Hodge wrote, "As there is abundant evidence of design in the works of nature, so all the works of God declare his wisdom. They show, from the most minute to the greatest, the most wonderful adaptation of means to accomplish the high end of the good of his creatures and the manifestation of his own glory. So also, in the whole course of history, we see evidence of the controlling power of God making all things work together for the best interests of his people, and the promotion of his kingdom upon earth. It is, however, in the work of redemption that this divine attribute is specially revealed. It is by the Church, that God has determined to manifest, through all ages, to principalities and powers, his manifold wisdom."¹

Marc Roby: That is a great statement. And it points out clearly that it is the creation of the Church of Christ, God's holy people, that is the pinnacle of God's creative acts.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's right. This world will one day be destroyed and God will create a new heaven and a new earth. At that time, all of those who have not surrendered to Christ will be sent to eternal hell to make God's perfect justice manifest, and all of those who have surrendered all to Christ will spend eternity with God in heaven. And all of this is for God's glory.

Paul tells us this in Philippians 2:9-11, where we read about God exalting Jesus Christ because of his obedience in carrying out the work of redemption. Paul wrote, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."²

Marc Roby: That does clearly show that God's ultimate purpose for creation is his own glory.

Dr. Spencer: And the tremendous wisdom displayed by God in his ultimate goal and the means he is using to accomplish that goal should cause us to break into praise with the apostle Paul, who wrote in Romans 11:33-36, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans, 1997, Vol. 1, pg. 401

² All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

should repay him?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

Marc Roby: That is such a wonderful passage. We cannot know the mind of God completely, but he has revealed enough that we can stand in awe of his great wisdom and power. Even the great apostle Paul, who had such a deep understanding given to him as he wrote that magnificent letter to the church in Rome, even he is reduced to simple worship as he meditated on these things.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we should all be brought to a place of great worship as we consider God’s attributes. But I want to return to the statement by Hodge. He said that all of creation accomplishes, “the high end of the good of his creatures and the manifestation of his own glory.” So, he has added something here that is very important, especially to us! God’s ultimate purpose in creation is his own glory, but in making his glory manifest he simultaneously does that which is good for his creatures.

Marc Roby: Which includes you, me and all of our listeners.

Dr. Spencer: And all of the angels too. Notice that if the purpose of God’s creation is to make his glory manifest, we must ask, to whom is it made manifest? God knows himself perfectly, so it can’t be that he will somehow see his own glory more clearly. I think it would be biblical to say that God’s purpose in creation is the joy he derives from making creatures who are capable of having fellowship with him and then making his glory manifest to those creatures.

Marc Roby: Now, how would you back that statement up biblically?

Dr. Spencer: Well, first, remember that Hodge said, at the end of his statement about God’s wisdom, that it is “in the work of redemption that this divine attribute is specially revealed. It is by the Church, that God has determined to manifest, through all ages, to principalities and powers, his manifold wisdom.” Therefore, my first point in support of my contention is that the church is God’s treasure, it is what he delights in.

In the Old Testament we are told six times that God’s people are his “treasured possession”. For example, in Exodus 19:4-6 we read that when Moses went up onto Mount Sinai and spoke with God, God told him to say the people, “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Marc Roby: That’s hard to fathom; that we could be God’s treasured possession. And in the New Testament the apostle Peter quoted from this verse. In 1 Peter 2:9 he writes, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s wonderful. The church consists of all born-again believers. In the Old Testament it is usually referred to as being synonymous with the nation of Israel, but the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 9:6 that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.”

Marc Roby: By which, of course, Paul means that not all people who are physically descended from Jacob, who was renamed Israel, are part of the true people called Israel.

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly what he means. Paul goes on to write, in Verses 7 and 8, “Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.”

Marc Roby: That passage could again use some explanation.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. Paul is distinguishing between two groups of people among Abraham’s descendants. Those whom God has chosen to save, who are called “children of the promise”, and those whom God has chosen to pass over and treat with justice, who are called “the natural children”.

Marc Roby: You know, that shows how silly some modern ecumenical movements are when they speak about the children of Abraham, or the Abrahamic religions, and act as if we all worship the same God.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s right. But getting back to the point I was making, we must remember that when God promised Abraham and Sarah they would have an heir it didn’t happen for a long time. During that time, Sarah became impatient as she got well past the age of child bearing, so she determined to solve the problem herself.

Marc Roby: That’s usually not a good idea. When we stop trusting God and take matters into our own hands we usually mess things up.

Dr. Spencer: And she did mess things up quite badly. As was the custom at the time, she gave her young handmaiden Hagar to Abraham and he had a son with her, who was named Ishmael. But this was not God’s plan. And so, years later, God came and told Abraham he would have a son through Sarah, even though they were both past the age where people can normally have children, and God’s promise miraculously came true. Sarah conceived and bore Isaac. Paul wrote in Galatians 4:23 that Abraham’s “son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.” And then in Verse 28 of that chapter he wrote, “Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.”

Marc Roby: Which establishes that salvation is not based on physical descent from Abraham or anyone else, it is based on God’s divine promise and his electing love.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it certainly is. And this group of people, the children of promise, having been chosen by God, are called his treasured possession. We are told in Psalm 149:4 that “the LORD takes delight in his people”. And, then again, in Zephaniah 3 the prophet tells the people about the salvation that God will ultimately bring about and in Verse 17 he says, “The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”

Marc Roby: That is almost impossible to imagine. God will delight in us? He will rejoice over us with singing?

Dr. Spencer: It is almost beyond belief. If God's word didn't tell it to us, I don't think anyone could have expected so much. But in this life, we still sin and grieve the Holy Spirit and make God angry, so he disciplines us as a father disciplines a child we are told in Proverbs 3:12 and Hebrews 12:10. God is in the business of *making* us holy so that we can come into his presence. We are told in Hebrews 12:14 that "without holiness no one will see the Lord." And in 1 Corinthians 1:2 the apostle Paul addresses his letter, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy". Paul also wrote in Ephesians 1:4 that God chose us in Christ "before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." But, we are not holy yet.

Marc Roby: I think that is abundantly obvious.

Dr. Spencer: It certainly is. And the process of making us holy began with Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to pay for our sins. We are told in Hebrews 13:12 that Jesus "suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood." And in Hebrews 12:2 we are told, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." That is an amazing statement. Jesus went to the cross and endured the wrath of God on our behalf "for the joy set before him."

Marc Roby: That joy must be something really wonderful.

Dr. Spencer: It certainly must be. In John 15:9-11 we read that Jesus told his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Look at that last statement; Christ's joy will be in us, we will have the same joy that he has.

Marc Roby: That is amazing. But that passage also equates obedience with love, which is not something most modern Churches would say.

Dr. Spencer: Churches might not say it, but Jesus did! And notice that joy comes from obedience, which comes from love. Getting back to Hebrews 12:2, when it said that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him, we should ask, "What is that joy?"

In his commentary on this passage, Pastor P.G. Mathew points out that this joy that was set before him had two aspects.³ One was the joy of pleasing the Father, which was a joy that he had throughout his life, even, I'm sure, on the cross. In other words, it was the joy that comes from obedience. And the other aspect was the coming joy of being restored to fellowship with the Father when his work was completed. But given what we read earlier, that God will delight in us and rejoice over us with singing, I think it is fair to add that this second aspect of Christ's joy is fellowship with the Father and with his treasured possession, which is the church, it is us.

³ P.G. Mathew, *Muscular Christianity*, Grace and Glory Ministries, 2010, pg. 346

Marc Roby: Alright. You have been providing biblical support for the statement you made a few minutes ago, that “God’s purpose in creation is the joy he derives from making creatures who are capable of having fellowship with him and then making his glory manifest to those creatures.” You first showed that the church, in other words God’s chosen people, are his treasured possession. And you showed that God will delight in his people and derive joy from fellowship with them in heaven.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And let me tie it back in with the statement made by Hodge. With regard to God’s attribute of wisdom he wrote that “It is, however, in the work of redemption that this divine attribute is specially revealed. It is by the Church, that God has determined to manifest, through all ages, to principalities and powers, his manifold wisdom.” The work of redemption is God’s working in this world to create his church.

Marc Roby: So, we could reword Hodge’s statement a bit and say that God’s divine wisdom is most especially revealed in his work of creating the church.

Dr. Spencer: I think that’s a fair statement. And it is interesting to also note that no matter how long it is until Christ’s second coming, it will be a *finite* time. But the church, which consists of all of those people God has redeemed out of the world, will spend eternity in God’s presence in heaven, which is literally infinitely longer than however long this universe lasts. So, we can say that the whole purpose of this present universe and of all human history is simply to serve as the backdrop if you will to God’s work of creating the true church. This present world bears the same relationship to eternity that a caterpillar does to a butterfly.

Marc Roby: That’s incredible to think about and certainly is an amazing display of God’s wisdom.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. And notice that Hodge said that by the Church, “God has determined to manifest, through all ages, to principalities and powers, his manifold wisdom.” And Hodge was right, the angels and demons are watching now and stand amazed at what God is doing. We are told in 1 Peter 1:12 that “Even angels long to look into these things.”

And the Old Testament tells us that the nations and the kings of the earth will see this great work. In Isaiah 62:1-4 the prophet declares, “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married.”

Marc Roby: A truly incredible prophecy. We will be a “crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand”. I can’t wait for that day. And Isaiah’s words remind me of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 3:10-11 Paul wrote that God’s “intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a great passage to make the same point. The church is the ultimate expression of the wisdom of God.

Marc Roby: Do you have anything more to say about God's wisdom?

Dr. Spencer: I want to close by pointing out that it is radically different from what this world considers wisdom. People are often offended by the gospel message. It disturbs them greatly that God would be wrathful against sin and that he would require a blood sacrifice to pay for it. But we must remember what the apostle Paul wrote in 1Corinthians 1:21-25, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

Marc Roby: That is a humbling conclusion to the topic. But before we sign off, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We'd love to hear from you.