

To the Praise of His Glory

The Wisdom of God in the Weakness of Love

I. The Great Wisdom Conflict

1. God and man are engaged in a great conflict over what is wisdom. God has chosen to build His kingdom on the weakness of love which is foolishness to the wisdom of man.
1 Corinthians 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.
2. Jesus makes clear at the end of the Sermon on the Mount after describing the heart of the kingdom of God, that at the end of the day, the question is not going to be what did we accomplish, but rather did we choose to live according to our own wisdom or according to His?
Matthew 7:22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' 24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock... 26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand...
3. Paul makes the same statement about the testing of our works to see what foundation they are built on, and what they are built with. It's not the size of our accomplishments that God will evaluate – it's the quality of what we built them with.
1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.
4. Paul boldly proclaims that all of our spiritual achievements are nothing if we did not learn to love. And he embraces that wisdom in his own life.
*1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. **Philippians 3:7** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*
5. We must come to embrace the wisdom of God in the weakness of love if we want to enter in to what God intended for us. The single greatest reason why we don't experience the life more abundantly that God created us for is we have too many better ideas about the best way to invest our life.

II. The Bridegroom God

1. God consistently describes Himself as the Bridegroom – not the Bride – not because He prefers the male gender, but because He's telling us something about our role versus His role. He is the Initiator, He is the Pursuer.
2. The story of redemption is not about us winning God's affections, it's about Him winning ours. It's the story of a Bridegroom God who went after His Bride when she played the harlot and demonstrated His love by purchasing her redemption while she was still chasing other lovers so that He could win her affections back.
Hosea 3:1 Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." 2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. 3 And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you."
Hosea 2:16 "And it shall be, in that day," Says the LORD, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' And no longer call Me 'My Master'... 19 I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.
3. At the end of the day, no flesh will boast in His presence. Not one soul is going to stand before Jesus and boast in their commitment to Him. We will all stand in awe and worship Him for His commitment to us in bringing us forth in love.
Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.
Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
4. If we think for a minute that the topic of conversation in heaven is going to be our successes and failures we need a serious rethink. On that sea of crystal glass there is only one never-ending song – how He has loved us well. It's about His power to take our weak hearts and bring them forth in love.
Revelation 19:6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."
5. What is it that's dominating our conversations with the Lord now? We need a shift of focus off from examining our own hearts to gazing upon His. "You deny my power to transform you by your unrelenting focus on your weakness."
2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

III. Friend of the Bridegroom Discipleship

1. John the Baptist saw himself as a friend of the Bridegroom. The apostles carried on ministry with that same heart. The goal of the gospel and the minister of the gospel is to restore the Bride of Christ into right relationship with her Bridegroom.

John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' 29 He who has the bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

2. Jesus came to answer the three basic questions of love, which became the backbone of the apostles' ministry: Who does God like? What is God like? What does God like?
3. "Who does God like?" is the foundation of our relationship. How does God feel about us, and what does He want for us? Jesus came to reveal God's love for weak and broken human beings – for the sinners, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the proud, the religious and the foolish. Totally independent from the question of what God likes, God loves the sinner and desires to be with them.
4. "What is God like?" is the substance of our relationship with God. It's knowing His nature and His glory that causes us to love Him in return. Revelation of all that He has done and is going to do, His beauty, His power and His glorious heart is what propels us deeper into devotion to Him.
5. "What does God like?" gives expression to our love for God. It's how we bring joy and delight to the One that we love, and how we get closer and closer through shared interests and common activities.
6. Our current epidemic of burnout, complacency and condemnation in the Church stems from our failure to address the first things. We're good at the last question – here's what it should look like if you love, but we're neglecting the things that actually produce love. We're trying to do the works of love without having the reality of love on the inside.
7. God is patient and gentle in His love. He will never call us into higher expressions of love without first leading us into a deeper reality of love. The call is to go deeper in love, resulting in higher expressions of love.

Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

IV. Paul's Response to the Gospel – The Foundation and Substance of Love

1. Paul presents the gospel in *Ephesians 1-3*, and in the midst of it he inserts two "therefore" prayers. Two things that we are to desire in light of the gospel.

2. In *Ephesians 1*, Paul tells us the gospel is about God – the glorious gospel of the blessed God (*1 Timothy 1:11*) – and about the good pleasure of God's heart. It's about what's going on in the heart of the Uncreated God.
Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

3. And he prays therefore, for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. That living knowledge of His glory and His glorious will is the substance of loving God.
Ephesians 1:15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe...

4. In *Ephesians 3*, Paul tells us the power of the gospel is access with confidence – entry with no shame, no barriers, no hindrances to the presence of God through the blood of Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 3:8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

5. And he prays therefore, for power to grasp the width, the length, the height, the depth of the love of Christ. That knowledge of Christ's love and how He's joined Himself to us in it is the foundation of loving God.
Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height —19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

V. The Glory of God in the Transformed Heart

1. God's deepest desire is to encounter His people with a living knowledge of Himself and of His love that ruins our hearts.

***Ephesians 3:19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

2. The way God's glory is displayed is in the effect that He has on those who see Him.

***Revelation 4:6** Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back... 8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"*

3. We were made to be those who get close to God and come out burning.

***Isaiah 6:1** ...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"*

4. It's the cry of the burning heart that has the power to shake heaven and earth.

***Isaiah 6:4** And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."*

5. God is building a city whose sole purpose is to reflect His light and glory – and that city is us. Glory breaks out from God and the way it reflects and refracts off of us makes it even more beautiful and glorious.

***Revelation 21:9** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal... 18 The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. 22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.*

VI. Becoming a People of One Thing

1. God puts a radically different set of priorities before us. Want to be a man after My own heart? Make yourself a man of one thing.
Psalm 27:4 One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.
2. By nature and by cultural influence, we're opposed to the call to a transformed heart. We hate the process – it's too close to home, too weak and it takes too long. We're a microwave society that wants instant results (even if it doesn't turn out as well as it could have). God prefers the slow-cooker of the wilderness.
3. We hate the weakness – it leaves us utterly dependent upon God (which is the point), and our flesh hates that. We so highly value independence and the self-made man. Christianity is not a self-help program. It's about encounter with a loving God who transforms us from glory to glory.
4. It takes faith to ignore what the world calls wisdom and to embrace the wisdom of God in the face of our own flesh and others around us telling us we're being foolish, but God endorses that decision.
Luke 10:38 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." 41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."
5. God's number one priority is that we pursue love. It's good and right to go after power, to go after obedience, to go after witness, but above all else we've got to go after a burning heart.