

God Cannot Make a Mistake

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?'" - Romans 11:33-34

Think back over this past month, or even this past week: How many times do you reckon you said the words, "I'm sorry"--and not even for those things you did intentionally; but just for mistakes you made, despite your best intentions. Maybe things you intended to do but forgot; things you attempted but failed; or even just "accidents" (misfortune) that foiled your plans. When we look back, we see that we leave behind a wake of mistakes in every area of our lives, everything we touch.

In fact, on a folk level we speak of mistakes as a very part of what it means to be human: "to err is human." Consider, for example, if I were to plan a trip for my family. I consider myself a pretty organized, detail-oriented person. But do you know how many times I've forgotten to bring something like my toothbrush--something I use everyday, something I think we'd all qualify as "important"? In other words, you'd think I wouldn't forget it. But the answer is, I've forgotten it many times. And I suspect I'm not alone. In fact, apparently this is a common enough mistake among our kind that hotels now frequently stock such items out of the likelihood that we're prone to forget them. Now, my excuse is that I keep my toothbrush on the counter, and not in the drawer with all the other supplies I grab when packing; and so I easily overlook it. But why is that? I'm prone to overlook things, even as I consider myself someone who's typically on top of things. I miss details. I zone out. I get in a rush.

Or consider all the other sort of things that could go wrong on a trip. Maybe I'm lazy and take too long getting out the door and risk missing my flight (we're irresponsible). Maybe I didn't realize there's a ballgame downtown, and traffic is backed up way more than I expected (we overlook things). Maybe when I arrive at the airport, I accidentally go to the wrong gate and don't realize 'til the last minute (we get confused).

Once my wife and I were flying out to Portland, OR where I was scheduled to speak at a church. But the night before, an huge, unexpected storm hit, and our flight was canceled. Eventually, after several connecting flights later and only a couple hours of sleep, we made it just in time for me to preach. Now, that storm was obviously outside of my control. So you might not exactly call that a "mistake" on my part. Sure. But whatever you call it, it only goes to show my limitations: e.g., I wasn't able to see the storm coming in order to schedule my flight a different day.

The examples could go on. In short, we make mistakes, not only because we are sinful (we err morally), but because we're weak (we err due to our limitations). There's things we don't know; abilities we don't have; and circumstances to which we're subject.

But not so with God. Remember, Christian, *God is not like us*. Consider who God is. God is, what we call, “omniscient,” meaning he knows absolutely everything--not only of things past and the present, but also of all things future. But not only so. We confess that God is also perfectly and infinitely *wise*. Wisdom, we might say, is the ability to apply one’s knowledge well. So perfect wisdom means “perfect knowledge applied perfectly.” God’s wisdom means that not only does he have all knowledge--he knows absolutely everything--but also that he always uses that knowledge with perfect precision.

This means he will never make a mistake. In fact, he *can’t* make a mistake. Everything he does is in accordance with his perfect wisdom. You’ll never hear God say, “Oops!” You’ll never hear Him say, “Well, I did my best!” Not even, “Good enough.” No, God’s wisdom means, in everything He plans and does, He always acts with perfect skill to maximize His glory and the good of His people. Consider that again: God’s perfect wisdom means that everything He does for you, every course of life into which He leads you, every circumstance you face, everything you’ve ever gone through and ever will, is not one degree shy of what His perfect wisdom demands in accomplishing your good. He’s not capable of making a mistake.

Consider Paul’s words in Romans 11:33ff. After reflecting on God’s plan on redemption wherein he “weaves” salvation to include Jew and Gentile alike, Paul concludes,

³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

God’s wisdom is beyond our grasp. In fact, it’s so deep, it’s unsearchable to us. If we could invent a radar for detecting wisdom, God’s wisdom would crash the system. Comparing God’s wisdom to human wisdom isn’t like converting inches into centimeters. There’s no conversion formula. They’re not even on the same plane. They’re a different breed altogether. As Paul says elsewhere (paraphrasing), God’s “foolishness” (as if he were to have any)--even *that* would be wiser than humanity’s best wisdom (1 Cor 1:25).

Not too long ago I was involved in leading a church plant in my city. Long story short: After a couple of years in, the resources and manpower didn’t come through as I had planned or expected. Now, we were fine. But things weren’t where I wanted them to be.

I had made huge sacrifices for this church plant: I uprooted my family and moved to the area. I left an existing church and ministry that I loved. And I declined opportunities to work in ministry (which I very much wanted to do) with jobs at other churches, and instead worked full-time in the “secular” field as a way of supporting our efforts.

Towards the end of this road, I struggled deeply: “Was all of this pointless? Was this all just some huge waste of time and effort--a worthless detour in God’s plan for my life?” If I’m honest with myself, I probably thought God could have benefited from some of my counsel at that moment. “You know, God, don’t you think it would have been smart to avoid all this? I can think of a lot of other ways we could have used this time that would have better accomplished your purposes.”

But as Isaiah 40:13 reminds us (paraphrase), “Can a human being provide God any counsel?” Ha! What are you going to teach God that he doesn’t already know? Or what advice can you give him wherein you possess wisdom that he lacks? God has all knowledge, and always applies his perfect knowledge perfectly.

God never acts rashly, failing to take into consideration all the available information. He never acts foolishly, exercising poor judgment. He never goofs by overlooking some small detail or forgetting something. And whereas we, despite our best intentions, sometimes lack ability to carry out our intentions, he never does. His designs are always backed by perfect power to carry out his perfect wisdom. He never falls prey to “chance” or misfortune, because he always knows what’s coming (and not only that, but he’s planned it!) In short, God cannot make a mistake.

Now it’s easy to believe this when things are going well. It’s easy to believe in God’s wisdom when there’s relatively nothing in our circumstances that seems to challenge it. But what about when things get difficult, when we face situations that press in and suggest otherwise, that cause us to think, “Does God know what He’s doing?” or, “Maybe He does allow mistakes in every once and awhile”? You see, whenever we grumble at our circumstances, we are functionally disbelieving the wisdom of God in that moment. We’re saying, “God, you messed up!” or at least, “You could have done a bit better.”

What we need in these moments (*for* these moments) is a big view of God that eclipses and stands above our circumstances. Don’t hear me wrong. This doesn’t mean we’ll never face anything rough. It doesn’t mean we don’t experience pain caused by the mistakes and wrongdoing of others. For sure, we will. *We do*. It doesn’t mean we won’t ever experience things that are unfortunate, even tragedy. To be clear, the reality of God’s wisdom doesn’t make these things go away. Rather, it infuses these circumstances with an underlying confidence that God knows what he’s doing. And not only does He *know* what He’s doing, but He can’t not work these things according to His perfect wisdom.

And so when doubts assail us--when we go through something that feels like it straight-up rips us apart, when something cherished is torn away from us, when plans we desperately wanted end up failing, or when we feel like we’ve been dealt a bad hand in life--we rest with confidence in what we know to be true about God notwithstanding our circumstances. We allow our view of our circumstances to fall in line with our view of our God. In other words, we combat unreality with reality--the unreality of our doubts vs. the reality of who God is: Our God is wise. He makes no mistakes.

Prayer: God, I trust and I affirm that you are a God who makes no mistakes. If I'm honest with you though, it's not always easy for me to believe this. In my sin, I trust myself and my own assessments above yours. I may not say this out loud, or even say it to myself in my own mind, but I often live with the functional belief that I know better than you do. God, rid me of my pride that thinks I, a lowly, sinful creature, somehow knows better than you, the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of all things. Do so that I might experience the holy pleasure of trusting in you more fully, resting in your providence more peacefully, and cherishing your goodness more steadfastly. Thank you for the deep wisdom you exercise over my life, even as I, in my pride, call it into question--even as I show I don't deserve this grace. You are so good to me. Amen.

Reflection questions:

1. What is the most recent time you have questioned or wondered if God has made a mistake?
2. What are ways in which you struggle the most to believe this truth about God?
3. What scripture (maybe a passage that describes God, or an account of something He's done) can you "carry with you" in your heart to be ready the next time doubts attack?
4. What is one way you have experienced this truth in your own life, in the past, that can encourage you today?