

The Depth of God's Riches (Rom. 11.33-36)

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³³ Oh, 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?"

³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11.33-36).

Introduction

I am ending the year with some studies that help us order our lives by means of the grand perspective, the grand perspective that Scripture gives us. Two questions dominate my concerns in the up coming messages: 1) what is the grand perspective that encompasses and transcends history? 2) And how can I bring my life into harmony with that grand perspective?

To answer these questions we must set our minds on God. We can only have this kind of mindset *as our own* by meditation, by prayerful mediation on the word of God. So today, for earnest mediation, I direct you to Romans 11.33-36 under the title, "The Depth of God's Riches." To guide our reflections, we will cover the following points from the text: His glory is God's chief end, God's chief end demonstrates sovereign grace, and sovereign grace shows the depth of God's saving riches.

1A. His Glory is God's Chief End

In Romans 11.36, Paul gives support for what he says in 11.34-35, which in turn support his elevated doxology of 11.33. He describes the foundation after he describes the building. We will follow his line of thought from the foundation upward like working from bedrock (v. 36) to a footing (vs. 34-35) to the building (v. 33).

Accordingly, God's glory is His chief end: "**from him and through him and to him are all things. To whom be the glory forever. Amen**" (11.36). This text makes it clear that God's glory is a comprehensive God-centered purpose. Let's break this grand perspective down into three parts or aspects.

1B. First, this end is a *purpose*.

Notice the key prepositions: from, through, and to. It is from the last preposition (to, unto, or toward) that we get the notion of purpose. Things are moving toward something. That to which they move is their end. So the end is not simply the final unit in a series like "The End" on the last page of a book. Instead, the end has the richer sense of purpose. There is something to be attained, an objective, or a goal. This first point is very simple and basic and stresses the fact that the end that we are talking about is not a final terminal point but a purpose (a goal, an objective, a chief end).

2B. Second, it is a *God-centered* purpose.

What is the goal, the objective, the purpose or end of all things? The goal is God: "to *Him*" in the phrases: **from him and through him and to him are all things**. Perhaps this is so obvious that it goes without saying. But I am not sure that it is that obvious because we keep getting it wrong. We are here for God. "**The Lord hath made all things for himself**" (Prov. 16.4, KJV). He is Himself the great objective and goal of creation (Col. 1.16, **all things were created by him and for him**). Scripture gives us a profoundly God-centered outlook. Perhaps, we should call it a profoundly God-centered *up look*. This is a biblical mindset that ought to govern our thinking and living.

From 11.36b we have another answer to the question, "what is the purpose of all things?" It is for Him in that it is *for His glory*. Paul ends the verse with the phrase "**To him be the glory forever! Amen.**" Thus God has made the display of His majesty, beauty, perfection, and excellence the grand purpose of history. The end is a God-centered purpose. It is all for Him, for His glory.

3B. Third, it is a *comprehensive* God-centered purpose.

Comprehensiveness is suggested by the relationship that exists between God's purpose and the series leading toward it. The purpose is related to the beginning, the middle, and the end of the series.

1) Let's begin at the beginning.

All things are **from God** (Rom. 11.36a). The end is the purpose that obtained from the very beginning (all that is for Him is from Him by creative power). This explains why there was a beginning in the first place. "All things" were brought into being for a purpose, for God's purpose, for the purpose that centers on Him, for the grand display of His glory.

2) What is in the middle?

All things are **through Him** (Rom. 11.36a). They not only exist by God's creative power but they move from the beginning to the end by His active agency for **he upholds the universe by the word of his power** (Heb. 1.3). This is a condensed way of saying that God is the providential ruler of all that He created. He is the active agent that sustains the creation across time. He is the sovereign Lord of history "**who works all things after the counsel of His will**" (Eph. 1.11). It all moves steadily along toward its goal through Him. The middle is the history of the creation under His Sabbath Lordship.

3) Of course, the series has a final point of termination.

It will come one day to the end. This God-centered purpose is related to the final destination point of all things (to the ending). That point in time is ordained by God and will be reached by His providential governance. God set the terminal point of history in accord with how it will serve His glory. The ending serves His end. The end of a book is also part of what a book is for. Just as every page is directed to His chief end, so is the last page of the book.

4) But the end is found beyond the ending.

God's end or purpose abides into the unending ages of eternity (Rom. 11.36b has "**into the ages**" or **forever**). The end, as a goal, encompasses all things from the beginning of the creation to the very end of history and beyond history into the unending ages to come.

Summary: what I have said so far is that God's end is a purpose. It is God-centered. It is for Him; it is for His glory. And it is a comprehensive purpose that sweeps across the history of the very universe in its breath and touches the history of you and me in the person of Christ our risen Savior and the Lord of glory. Jesus is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.

All things past, present, and future serve the singular end of God's glory. His glory must be His chief and ultimate end. It is His most valued and sought after goal. It is His ultimate purpose that does not serve as a means to some further end, but it is that which is sought for its own sake and for God's own delight. It is the final end where all subordinate ends finally come to rest. So, we have this first main point: His glory is God's chief end.

2A. God's chief end demonstrates sovereign grace

Now to move up from this bedrock foundation to the concrete footing of the building here, we need to ask, what is the "for" there for? Why is it there at the beginning of 11.36? This little word is a connective that tells us that verse 36 is the support for the claims Paul makes in 34-35. This means that we know how to answer the questions of these two verses: ³⁴"... **who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?**" ³⁵"**Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?**" (11.34-35). We can answer them pointedly and fully.

Pointedly, we have the intuitively obvious answers that a) no one exhaustively knows the mind of God; no one can follow every thought of God about every thing that exists. In other words, His mind and thoughts are ultimately incomprehensible. b) No one counsels Him; His actions are completely independent of the creation and man, and c) no one has God as his debtor. There is no one who gave something to God so that, because of it, God owes him something in

return. God owes man nothing. God is debtor to no man. In sum, these answers inform us that God relates to man in sovereign and ultimately incomprehensible grace.

Now, we can consider the fuller answers. The fullness comes from the bedrock foundation of God's goal for all that exists. Because all things past, present, and future serve the singular end of God's glory, then His glory must be His chief and ultimate end, His most valued and sought after goal. It is His ultimate purpose that does not serve as a means to something further. It is the final end where all subordinate ends finally come to rest. Therefore, what He gives to man, within creation and within history, comes from Him without any constraint on Him. He acts freely, sovereignly, and in ways beyond our grasp. It is impossible that this sweeping purpose regarding all things involve any indebtedness of God to man. His actions arise independently in God's purpose for all things, without human counsel or co-operation. In other words, to make a long story short, His giving to man is gracious, sovereign, and beyond our intellectual reach. Thus, God's chief end demonstrates sovereign, mind-boggling grace.

3A. Sovereign grace shows the depths of God's saving riches

The giving in view in this context has to do with the salvation of people from all families of the earth including Gentiles with Jews on an equal footing. They are all consigned in sin: **God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all** (11.32). All are equally sinful and under the just judgment of God as they store up wrath against the day of wrath. Paul makes this clear throughout the book of Romans and he makes it clear here in two primary points.

1) Point one: though chosen to bring blessing to the nations, the Jews have come under judgment: **As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers** (Rom. 11.28). Therefore, Paul applies the indictment against past Israel to the Israel of his day (the Israel of the time between): **But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people"** (Rom. 10.21). Point one: the chosen nation is under judgment.

2) Point two: God keeps His word to Israel to bless them and the nations through them **So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous** (Rom. 11.11). Even in their fall and standing under the judgment of God, God is keeping His promise to them to bless the Gentiles through them. In turn, God uses the blessing of the nations to provoke Israel to jealousy and thus to save a remnant from among them by grace, as Paul makes patently clear in Romans 11.1-5: **I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.** ² **God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?** ³ **"Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."** ⁴ **But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."** ⁵ **So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.**

This is the background of 11.32: **For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.** The word "all" refers to all nations, people of all families of the earth including Israel with the Gentiles. God keeps His word in ways we would have never imagined; He does the unexpected and draws saving mercy out from the fires of just judgment. He keeps His word to bless the family of Abraham and to make his family a blessing to all families of the earth. And, remarkably, the sovereign Lord keeps His covenant to Abraham despite the radical disobedience of his children, the people to whom He held out His hands (Rom. 10.21). These thoughts lead Paul to burst forth in the praise (the high, exalting, great, awe-struck praise) of 11.33.

Again, we observe the use of the word "for" (beginning v. 34). It is there for a reason, namely, to support the doxology of verse 33: **Oh, the depth...how inscrutable his ways!** ³⁴ **For...**

The bedrock foundation and footing in 34-35 and 36 work together to support the grand doxology of verse 33. The truths of 34-36 justify the profound truth of 33 that God's knowledge, wisdom, unsearchable judgments, and inscrutable ways have a majestically rich depth: **Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his**

ways! Because of 34-36, we know that the ideas here intertwine: he is speaking about the riches of God, the unsearchable, inscrutable and unfathomable riches of God's knowledge, wisdom, judgments, and ways. O the depth and inscrutability of His knowledge, O the depth and inscrutability of His wisdom, O the depth and inscrutability of His judgments (decisions and choices), and O the depth and inscrutability of His ways.

There is no way that we can plumb the depths of the riches of God's wisdom, knowledge, judgments and ways because they come to realization by sovereign grace that has its roots in His ultimate, chief, and comprehensive end beyond all ends, the display of His own glory.

God's chief end, His own glory, demonstrates sovereign grace and sovereign grace with its roots in God's chief end demonstrates the depth of divine riches in the saving of sinners across time and for eternity.

Conclusion

Paul shows us how to engage in heartfelt and thoughtful worship. He is deeply engaged in exultant exclamation: "O the depth...O the riches" of God's thoughts and ways (**Romans 11:33-35** ³³ **Oh, 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?"** ³⁵ **"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"**). Consideration of these things is humbling. It humbles reason. It leads the reasoning self to bowed head and bended knee.

From the dust before the Lord we must raise our voices and acknowledge our utter dependence and God's absolute independence and sovereignty. No one has been His counselor; He is debtor to no one. His mercy is freely given in ways unsearchable by blessing Israel and the nations through the disobedience of both (Rom. 11:31-32). Marvelously, judgment on the Jews leads to mercy to the Gentiles, which in turn results in the blessing of the Jews! These things are glorifying to God. They give Him praise and honor. But this is insufficient. It is but a beginning. Paul must rise even higher in praise, maximally higher. He thus reaches back to the beginning; that is, to a point beyond the beginning to the point of origin of all things in God. Then He races across time, space, and history. From the past across the present and beyond the future of all of created reality, he catapults us in thought into the unending future: **"From Him, through Him and to Him are all things. To Him the glory, forever, Amen."**

All glory will be ascribed to Him into the unending ages of eternity. So, this must be the apex of worship here and now along the way. If you seek an ultimate answer to why you have been accepted by God (why did He welcome you?), the answer is plain: it is that you **"bring praise to God"** (Rom. 15:7) and **glorify Him for His mercy** (Rom. 15:9).

To the triune God be all glory now and forevermore, amen!