



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

“Bold Glory”

Romans 11:33-36

A doxology is an expression of praise to God, usually (but not always) in the form of a short hymn sung as part of a Christian worship service.

Chapter eleven closes with what many call a doxology; and it is, although I think we should hear it as more spontaneous. It’s like when a worship leader or songwriter gets a lyric directly, immediately, from the Lord.

Paul was overwhelmed by what he’d written thus far in Romans under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit and exploded into this doxology.

He was thinking back, not just over chapter eleven or even chapters nine through eleven, but over the entire first eleven chapters.

It’s a good place for a song, too, in that it ends part one of Romans, the doctrinal section, and anticipates the remaining chapters which are more about the practice of the Christian life in the church and in the world.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

The “riches” Paul had in mind are “the wisdom and knowledge of God.”

We are not told, specifically, what “wisdom” or “knowledge” Paul meant. William MacDonald has written a pretty reliable Bible commentary called *The Believer’s Bible Commentary*. He makes this general observation:

This concluding doxology looks back over the entire epistle and the divine wonders that have been unfolded. Paul has expounded the marvelous plan of salvation by which a just God can save ungodly sinners and still be just in doing so. He has shown how

Christ's work brought more glory to God and more blessing to men than Adam lost through his sin. He has explained how grace produces holy living in a way that law could never do. He has traced the unbreakable chain of God's purpose from foreknowledge to eventual glorification. He has set forth the doctrine of sovereign election and the companion doctrine of human responsibility. And he has traced the justice and harmony of God's dispensational dealings with Israel and the nations. Now nothing could be more appropriate than to burst forth in a hymn of praise and worship.

Though God has revealed all this (and more), His “judgments” remain “unsearchable.”

“Unsearchable” means they cannot be fully comprehended. You should keep searching them out but they will always be deeper than you can fathom.

As for His “judgments,” Albert Barnes writes, “in the case before us, it means his arrangements for conferring the Gospel on people.” In other words, how people get saved.

Salvation is a simple enough arrangement between God and man, is it not? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!” “Whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.”

But when we start peeling back the layers, looking at the moment the salvation transaction occurs, it remains in many ways “unsearchable.”

For example, think of all the arguing that still surrounds God’s foreknowledge, God’s election, and God’s predestination. All these are critical to the salvation of a soul; **but they cannot be fully comprehended. or we would have an agreement among orthodox believers.**

Not everyone would agree they cannot be fully comprehended! There are those who think they know *exactly* how those things ‘work’ to accomplish the salvation of a sinner. I suggest that if you think you’ve got God all figured-out in these areas, you are more than slightly arrogant.

A theologian I’ve been reading lately made the following suggestion. He was discussing the arguing that exists between two particular schools of systematic theology, Calvinism and Arminianism. He said,

Both Calvinists and Arminians should admit the weaknesses of their own theologies and not pretend that the other one alone contains tensions, apparent inconsistencies, difficulties explaining biblical passages and mysteries.

I like what J. B. Phillips said when he said, "If God was small enough to figure out, He wouldn't be big enough to worship."

None of this is to say we should not study or that there is anything wrong with being systematic. It's only to admit some things will not be totally found-out.

Topics like foreknowledge, election, and predestination are important. What approach should we take to these when faced with a difficulty or mystery? **We should choose according to what we know to be true about God's nature and character.**

If our conclusions are contrary to the nature and character of God, *then they are wrong conclusions!* A system of theology that 'works' only if I must surrender certain aspects of God's revealed nature, or certain definite attributes of God, is just bad theology.

"His ways [are] past finding out." We're generally to know God's "ways." They are the ways of grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, acceptance, and the like.

But how He moves the entire universe in order to accomplish His purposes **for your life** are most definitely "past" our "finding out."

Think Joseph in the Old Testament! Who could find-out God's plan to save the children of Israel from extinction by a famine that was far in the future by using the wrath of Joseph's brothers to praise Him?

Let me add this. If God's ways are "past finding out," **then we should stop trying to discover the definite, final outcome of every circumstance we are in.** The story of Joseph doesn't teach us that we will always see or know the final outcome. It establishes that God always has a final outcome and that He who began this good work in us will most definitely complete it.

I just finished a little book that was an apologetic about God allowing suffering in the world - sometimes even on a massive scale. The author's conclusion was,

Our faith is in a God who has come to rescue his creation from the absurdity of sin, the emptiness and waste of death, the forces... that shatter living souls... Until that final glory, however, the world remains divided between two kingdoms, where light and darkness, life and death grow up together and await the harvest. In such a world, our portion is charity, and our sustenance is faith, and so it will be until the end of [these] days.

Reading between the lines, one of the things he was saying is that things won't always make Joseph-like sense to us this side of eternity. There will be many things "past finding out."

Paul thought this praiseworthy rather than a complaint - **and so should we.**

Romans 11:34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?"

This verse is a quotation, with a slight change, from Isaiah 40:13, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?"

The Lord has revealed "His mind" to us to the extent He is able and we have need. He told the Jews, for example, that His thoughts toward them were thoughts of peace and not evil, to give them an expected end (Jeremiah 29:11).

Nevertheless, God's "mind" is mostly unknown to me insofar as exactly how what I am experiencing will bring me to the "expected end" of being conformed into the image of Jesus. I cannot make the connections between His providence and my maturity. I don't really understand my trials and exactly how they are tailored to my spiritual growth.

As a brand-new Christian I came across Edith Scheaffer's description of these unknowns. She compared the various events of our lives to a beautiful tapestry God was working on, thread-by-thread. Only on this side

of eternity we see the backside of the tapestry. It seems a jumbled mess! Only later, when God is finished and we are transformed, will we see it from His side.

“Or who has become His counselor?” Obviously no one should presume to counsel the Lord. Why say this here? It reminds me that His “mind” towards me is set and He needs no direction from anyone as to how to bring about what is best for me.

I’m not an experiment to God; there’s no trial-and-error going on in my life, only trials (when necessary) to bring me to the expected end.

The God who saved me is busy sanctifying me and He will one day glorify me.

Romans 11:35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

God was not in debt to us. We added nothing to Him. He didn’t need us. He chose to create us, to enjoy fellowship with us. But all the initiative was always His.

He even took a big risk, if I can say that without diminishing anything about God. Creating us with free will ‘risked’ the ruin of creation through the fall of man.

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Keeping with the theme of the salvation God provides mankind, David Guzik writes:

It is all of Him. This plan came from God. It wasn’t man’s idea. We didn’t say, “I’ve offended God and have to find a way back to Him. Let’s work on a plan to come back to God.” In our spiritual indifference and death we didn’t care about a plan, and even if we did care we aren’t smart enough or wise enough to make one. It is all of Him. It is all through Him: Even if we had the plan, we couldn’t make it happen. We couldn’t free ourselves from this prison of sin and self. It could only happen through Him, and the great work of Jesus on our behalf is the through Him that brings salvation.

We can also read verse thirty-six as a commentary on human history, from the creation through eternity.

“All things” must refer to everything that is not God and, therefore, mean His created universe. Certainly creation is “of Him” in the sense He is Creator.

Creation is “through Him” in the sense He sustains all things by His power.

Creation is “to Him” in the sense that it exists to bring Him “glory forever.” We certainly see creation bringing God glory forever in eternity. But how does it do so right now, in its fallen state?

At the heart of the Gospel, of course, is a triumphalism, a conviction that the will of God cannot ultimately be defeated and that the victory over evil and death has already been won. We read, for example, in Colossians 2:15 “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

Earlier Paul wrote that though all creation now groans, it anticipates the “revealing of the sons of God,” meaning us in our final, glorified bodies in eternity.

Bold glory indeed!