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Romans 11:33-36 “The Great Knowledge and Wisdom of God”

Intro. On several occasions Paul concluded the doctrinal portions of his letters with a doxology of praise to God. The book of Romans was no exception. As someone has remarked, “Theology becomes doxology!”

An important question to ask is this: Why did Paul break out in praise to God? In the early chapters Paul wrote about the sin and rebellion of man against God. And then he wrote about what God has done in Christ to make it possible for Him to forgive the sinner, and yet remain just and righteous. Paul makes it clear that we can be forgiven and made right in the eyes of God simply by trusting in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, based upon what He did at the cross. And then Paul wrote about what God has done to make it possible for us to live lives that overcome sin and produce goodness and love. Then in chapters 9-11 Paul dealt with the problem of Jewish unbelief. Some would conclude that either God “messed up” in choosing Israel, or Jesus is not really the Messiah, since even His own people rejected Him. Yet in those chapters Paul argues that in the plan of God, He took something bad, which was Israel’s rejection of Jesus, and made something good. You see, in the wisdom of God, out of His death came life and forgiveness of sin for us. Furthermore, because they continued to reject Christ, the good news of salvation went out to us Gentiles. So, instead of one nation being saved, now multitudes from every nation are saved! And in the plan of God the day is coming when even Israel shall have a time of widespread repentance and salvation, as Paul says in vv.25b-26a, “blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved....” And so Paul concludes his argument by saying in v.32, “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.” Thus, the “wrath revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness” (1:18) has given place to the mercy which embraces all the nations of the earth (11:32).

No wonder Paul then breaks out in a doxology of praise to God for the exceeding abundance of His wisdom and His knowledge. What I want to do this morning is lead us all to join Paul in praise to God. If we are going to praise God, we need to think about why God is worthy of praise. So in v.33 Paul opens with an exclamation concerning some of the attributes or characteristics of God. “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!” Now I think what Paul does is that he takes each of those attributes and briefly discusses them in reverse order beginning in the last of v.33. So let us praise God, and give thanks to God for who He is, and what He has done. Let us do so by considering first of all:

I. THE GREAT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In v.33 Paul praises “the depth of the richesof the... knowledge of God.” Knowledge applies chiefly to the apprehension and all-inclusive understanding of all truth and all facts. The knowledge of God is perfect. His knowledge is not, like ours, obtained from without. It is intuitive. In fact, He is the ultimate source of all knowledge. Thus, He has no need to learn. He already knows everything! His knowledge does not result from observation or from a process of

reasoning. Furthermore, His knowledge is simultaneous, so that He sees things at once in their totality. For example, He knows what you are thinking at the same time that He knows what I am thinking!

Now the main point about the knowledge of God that Paul makes is the fact that His knowledge is so great. In v.33 Paul talks about the “the depth of the riches . . .of the . . . knowledge of God.” In the last of v.33 he uses two other words to describe the greatness of God’s knowledge. He says His judgments or decisions are “unsearchable” and His ways are “past finding out.” That later word literally refers to something impossible to trace to its source. The word could be used of a blood-hound who found it impossible to follow the scent of a criminal, or of a guide who could not follow a poorly marked path in the woods. His ways and the depth of His knowledge are incomprehensible. In fact, Paul asks in v.34, “For who has known the mind of the LORD?” What we know is like a drop out of the ocean in comparison to what God knows.

It’s kind of like what happens when I ask my son Andrew about the kind of math he studied for his master’s degree at Purdue University. He knew it was incomprehensible to me, so he really couldn’t explain it.

These verses are consistent with the biblical truth that God is omniscient or all-knowing. The knowledge of God is complete and fully conscious, while man’s knowledge is always partial, and often fails to rise into clear light of consciousness. He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or present. God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feelings, all desires, all things visible and invisible in the heavens and in earth. The great knowledge of God even encompasses the future. You and I do not know what will take place in the future, but God does. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Bible that have been literally fulfilled.

Can you imagine how much knowledge it took to create the world in which we are living? There is order, design and great knowledge demonstrated in creation that far surpasses our brightest scientists. Did you realize that bacteria propel themselves using flagella filaments propelled by a true rotary biological motor? This motor is only the size of a virus. Yet it can rotate at over 1000 times per second! Furthermore, think of the knowledge required to create the most advanced creature on earth, a human? The DNA structure that is required for life and reproducing like kind is absolutely amazing.

We also see the greatness of the knowledge of God in Jesus, the Son of God. Even at the age of twelve He possessed great knowledge and understanding. Luke 2:47 says, “And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.” Three times in the Gospels it says the people were “astonished at His teaching” (Mt 7:28; Luke 4:32; Mark 1:22). In John 7:15 we read that the Jews marveled, saying, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” He never went to college or graduate school, but He knew more than those who had.

There are several applications that we could make from this wonderful truth about God. The first is given in the text itself. We should respond with praise for His great knowledge. Will you praise Him today for His great knowledge, much of which is beyond our comprehension?

Secondly, if you are a Christian, this truth about the omniscience of God is good news. How completely satisfying to turn from our limitations to a God who has none. I may not understand the reason for all that happens to me, but I know that God does. There is not a trial or a problem that comes into my life that God does not know about. Nothing takes Him by surprise.

How unutterably sweet is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father knows us completely? No enemy can make an accusation stick; no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us. And Jesus knows, by personal experience, our trials and temptations. When He walked among us, He felt our pains in their naked intensity of anguish. He knew what it felt like to be rejected. His knowledge of our afflictions and adversities is more than theoretic; it is personal, warm, and compassionate.

If you are lost this is bad news. In Jer. 16:17 God says, "For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes." That God knows each person through and through can be a cause of shaking fear to the man that has something to hide. Even though you may fool many people about what you have done, or who you really are, God can never be fooled. You may appear to be a Christian on the outside, but God knows the heart.

Finally, I want to make another application. Since God's knowledge is so much greater than ours, and since His knowledge is perfect, we should seek to discover the knowledge and truth He has chosen to reveal to us. Now note again the question of v.34, "For who has known the mind of the LORD?" Even though much of God's knowledge is incomprehensible and beyond our reach, that does not mean that we cannot obtain any of the knowledge of God. The fact is we can know at least part of the mind of God. Dt. 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." With the aid of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11-14), and with an open Bible, we can know enough of the mind of God to be saved, and live the right kind of life. The highest revelation of God found in the Bible is Jesus Himself. He came to reveal God to us (Jn. 1:18). We would do well to discover all we can of the knowledge of God.

Yet, so many do not avail themselves of the knowledge and truth of God. It is now official policy that secular government excludes the knowledge of God from our schools, and from our policy decisions. Our courts no longer base their decisions on God's truth, but humanistic reasoning. How foolish! And it is just as foolish for you to try to live your life according to your own understanding, when you could seek to live according to the truth of God found in the Scriptures.

Not only does Paul praise the knowledge of God, but also:

II. THE GREAT WISDOM OF GOD

In v.33 Paul also made reference to "the depth of the riches ...of the wisdom ...of God!" Wisdom, among other things, is that attribute of God whereby He accomplishes the best and highest purposes with the best possible means. Furthermore, all the means that He employs must be consistent with His righteousness. What complicates the whole situation is that God would have to accomplish His purpose without violating the free will of man! It certainly requires great wisdom to do that.

One of the purposes that God is working to accomplish is His own glory and praise. It is His will and desire to enjoy the praise of His creation. Can you not see how God is wisely bringing this to pass? For example, since we are saved by His grace and not by our works, God receives the praise for our salvation from multitudes of people for all eternity.

Furthermore, God's purpose or end includes our highest good. God has a wonderful plan for your life. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:7, "But we speak the wisdom of God...which

God ordained before the ages unto our glory.” What mind but God’s mind could think out a plan of salvation that would redeem ruined man? By the infinite wisdom of God He orders the whole scheme of creation, providence, and redemption, so that the glory of God and the happiness of His creatures are both wonderfully promoted. The atonement, the new birth, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the spread of the gospel, the ultimate overthrow of evil, and the final establishment of Christ’s righteous Kingdom all are the product and work of the wisdom of God.

Finally, we see from our text that the wisdom of God is perfect and complete. This is implied in the last of v.34, “Or who has become His counselor?” He needs neither consultants nor research assistants. He doesn’t need your counsel or advice. The apostle is accurate when He refers to God as the “only wise” (1 Timothy 1:17).

God has charged Himself with full responsibility for our eternal happiness and stands ready to take over the management of our lives the moment we turn in faith to Him. With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack? Surely we are the most favored of all creatures. We should let Him counsel *our* lives. In Isa. 9:6 we find a prophecy of the coming Messiah who would be called “Wonderful Counselor.” We would do well to avail ourselves of the wisdom of God. In fact, James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” Furthermore, God has given us His Word to lead and guide our lives. So don’t be a fool. Seek the wisdom of God. You will be so much better off living according to His wisdom rather than your own.

Not only do we praise God for His knowledge and wisdom, but we also praise:

III. GOD’S RICHES

Again, v.33 says, “Oh, the depth of the riches ... of God!” Riches, in and of itself, suggests an inexhaustible supply. God is not poor in anything. Here in this text Paul is primarily referring to the inexhaustible supply of God’s knowledge and wisdom, but it is certainly true that God is rich in every respect. Eph. 3:8 speaks of the “unsearchable riches of Christ.” In Romans 2:4 Paul referred to “the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering.” In Romans 10:12 he says, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.” No doubt Paul is saying that God is rich in mercy and grace. In fact, Ephesians 1:7 refers to “the riches of His grace.” Ephesians 2:4 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us....”

There are a number of applications that I want to make from this wonderful truth of the riches of God:

A. God Is Rich with No Debts! – You can borrow money and appear to be rich, but if you are in debt, you are not truly rich. But God is not in debt. God is debtor to none. He owes us nothing. Paul says in v.35, “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” His favor is never compensation to us. The creature can do nothing to place God under obligation. It will be perceived how appropriate is this thought, in reference to the doctrines which Paul had been teaching. Men are justified, not on the ground of their own works, and the strength of their own will, but by the mercy and grace of God; they are chosen and called to eternal life, not on the ground of anything in them, but according to God’s purpose. God, therefore, is the Alpha and the Omega of salvation. There is nothing you can do to earn your salvation and make God indebted to you.

By the way, this is one reason why you can't outgive God. When somebody gives Him something, He turns around and gives him more. Years ago someone asked a financier in Philadelphia, a wonderful Christian man, "How is it that you have such wealth, and yet you give away so much?" The financier replied, "Well, I shovel it out, and God shovels it in; and God's shovel is bigger than my shovel!" [Told my McGee, 727].

Then in v.36 Paul explains why no one can make God a debtor, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things..." "Out of Him" means God is the all-sufficient cause and source of everything. All things were created through His agency. And all things were created for Him. There is not an inch of any sphere of life over which Jesus Christ does not say, "Mine!"

We would be wise to avail ourselves of the riches of God. Have you availed yourself of the riches of His grace? Romans 5:20 says, "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." God's grace is greater than your sin. Are you saved today? Have you received His forgiveness? Whatever you need, God is more than able to supply. Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." If you need patience, God will give you more patience if you ask Him and trust Him. Whatever you truly need, God is rich and can supply your need.

Because of this fact:

B. We Owe Him Everything – God is rich and indebted to no one, but we are certainly indebted to Him. God has created you. He has saved you by His grace. He has provided for you. We owe Him everything. Again, v.36 says, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things..."

There are at least 2 ways that you are to repay God. One of our obligations is stated in the last of v.36, "to whom be glory forever." God is the end and goal of all creation. Thus "the chief end of man is to glorify God," which Paul does here. You owe God the praise and thanksgiving of your lips and heart. We ought to praise God, for He is rich. Does the contemplation of the work of redemption, and the remembrance of our own experience, lead us to adore with admiration of the wisdom and goodness of God? Oh, if we could only learn that God does not need us but we need Him. Do you praise God? That is one of the things we do when we gather on Sundays. Are you regular and faithful when it comes to praising God in the assembly of the saints?

But praising Him with our lips is not enough. That is why Paul goes on to say in the very next verse, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." How foolish it is for people to strut like peacocks, seeking to accumulate personal worth and fame to impress other humans. We are so insignificant compared to God, and we can only gain true significance in our relationship with God. Giving ourselves to God completely is our reasonable service. That is the wise thing to do. Are you committed to God? Do you obey Him? Have you given yourself completely to Him to serve Him?

You know, in a chemical experiment, it is very important to follow the laws of chemistry. You cannot decide to make the experiment according to your whims. You must make it according to the laws of the chemicals involved. Brilliant though you may be, one little slip may cost you a hand or even your head. To avoid spiritual explosions, one must follow the directions of the Great Chemist, the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, there are spiritual laws in the universe, and it is wise to live in accordance to those laws, instead of trying to live contrary to those laws.

To glorify God and to serve Him forever, this is the chief end of man, and in doing this is the greatest happiness of man. Be wise!

Conclusion: Oh, the great knowledge of God! Oh, the wisdom of God! What great riches our God possesses! Let us respond by praising Him. Let us stand in awe of the great wisdom of God. In the book of Revelation, God predicted that by the end of time as we know it, millions of people from all nations will believe in Jesus as Savior. Somehow, in spite of resistance by Satan and the corruption of man, God has accomplished His purpose!

Won't you be one of those who will give your heart to Jesus? Christian, let us avail ourselves of the knowledge, wisdom, and riches of God.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, "God's Covenants" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Millard J. Erickson, ed., *The Living God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 348-351; Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Ralph Neighbor, *Survival Kit II* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984), 35; Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 53, 61-70; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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