

## **Doxology Series: From Him, Through Him & To Him Are All Things**

**Behold Our God – Read the Bible for Life Series #50**

**Romans 11:33-36**

**Pastor David Sunday**

**October 21, 2012**

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Of grace and glory, we thank You Father that You, the Awesome God, held nothing back so that You might gather us in. We thank You that You poured out on Your Son all the wrath that He did not deserve so that You could lavish on us grace that we had not even desired. And now, as we have our eyes opened to the glory and wonder of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God our Father, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would fellowship with us in this time in Your Word; that He would kindle our hearts to be an altar of blazing worship and devotion to You for the sake of Your name and Your glory here and among all the nations, we pray. Amen.

We have four weeks left in our Bible reading plan through the New Testament and we're going to focus these four weeks on four doxologies—hymns of praise and adoration to our great God. It's a fitting way to conclude our recent missions focus. John Piper says, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't." One day missions will come to an end but worship will go on forever. Let's focus our hearts and minds these last four weeks through the New Testament on the great worship of God that's contained in these doxologies beginning with Romans 11:33.

*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?"*

*"Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?"*

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory  
forever. Amen.*

I wonder what Paul looked like when he spoke those words. When that doxology first poured forth from his lips, was his face radiant with holy light? Were tears streaming down his face? Did he lift his hands in awestruck adoration of this great and magnificent

God, or did he fall flat on his face in humble contrition? How I would love to hear the tone and tenure of his voice as Paul begins to give vent to this ecstatic exclamation of praise. I imagine him breathless in amazement as he ponders God's ingenuity—the sheer complexity of His wise and gracious plans to redeem the world. This eruption of worship has been building steam in Paul's heart since Romans 1—his magisterial letter about the gospel of Jesus Christ—where He declared in Romans 1:16, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

In those first three chapters as he lays the foundation of why every single person needs the salvation that God offers in Jesus Christ, Paul states, *“None is righteous, no, not one.”* I can imagine the volume rising when he comes to those powerful words in Romans 3:21 as Paul speaks forth this great summary of the gospel, saying:

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

Through faith, a justification; through faith, a declaration from God that sinners are now righteous in His sight if they believe in what Jesus, His Son, has done for them on the cross. In chapter four, Paul begins to talk about how that faith was put on display in Abraham's life. In chapter five, he ponders this way of salvation through faith in Jesus and proclaims these glorious words:

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Later on in that chapter, Paul says,

*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

Then Paul starts to talk about what we lost in Adam and what we've gained through our union with Jesus Christ. All that Adam ruined through the Fall, Christ has now restored. And he brings chapter five to a conclusion with these triumphant words:

*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...*

Then in chapter six, Paul goes on to show how this grace that abounds in Jesus Christ not only pays for our sins and brings us to life, but this grace also clothes us with power to do what is right. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 6:4. *"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* Union with Christ leads to newness of life.

I love how Dane Ortlund summarizes the truths of Romans 5-8. He says, "In Adam, we rest in sin and fight God—a fight that cannot be won. In Christ we rest in God and fight sin—a fight that cannot be lost." As Paul ponders these truths, he is so confident in the grace of God *"who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,"* that he begins chapter eight with a defiant rejection of all the devil's accusations against God's blood-bought children in those words that we love to hear: *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death"* (Romans 8:1-2).

Because we are freed from condemnation and destined for glory, we are able to count these present sufferings that we experience as unworthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us in the end. As Paul says in Romans 8:28,

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things?*

You can feel the lava rising in the volcano of Paul's heart. You can feel that he's about to erupt in praise as he says, *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"* Paul ends that chapter by saying,

*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor*

*anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

He's amazed at this grace. In chapters 9-11, Paul ponders the mysteries of God's election. It's amazing to him that God would choose to save anyone as rebellious as this world. Ponder the faithfulness of God's promises to those who trust in Him; He is working His sovereign purposes out in a way that is going to bring maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to His people who trust Him. This mystery of God's election is what brings Paul to the end of his ability to express in words the wonder of God's grace.

That's what brings us to this doxology of Romans 11. It's everything Paul has said in Romans leading up to this that's been causing this rising intensity in Paul's heart, and he just has to give vent to it in praise and adoration.

One of the Swiss commentators said that Paul is like a traveler in the Alps. He has come now to the summit of Mt. Blanc. He looks down at the depths below and the vast panorama of light from God's sovereign grace that shines over the whole scene before him. He says with breathless astonishment in Romans 11:33, "*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*" (Psalm 95:6). He gathers us together and says, "You've been hearing all about the gospel, all this glorious truth and theology. Now come! Come magnify the Lord with me."

Let's pause here. We can't say anything more until we lift up our hearts in worship to Him.

*Oh, magnify the LORD with me,  
and let us exalt his name together!*

(Psalm 34:3)

Paul is teaching us here in Romans 11:33 that we ought never to separate theology from doxology. We ought never to separate learning about God from worship to God and worship of God. Worship of God must always be fueled by knowledge of Him—theology and truth. If you worship a God Whom you don't know, it becomes idolatry. On the other hand, knowledge of God—truth about God—must always fuel worship of God. How can we say we know a God Whom we rarely worship? How can we say we know truth about God if it doesn't melt, move, lift our hearts, elevate our affections and bring forth from us heartfelt adoration?

Bishop Handley Moule from over a century ago said, “We must be aware equally of an un-devotional theology and of an un-theological devotion.” Worship of God and knowledge of God go hand in hand.

## Three Gauges

As Paul leads us in worship here in Romans 11, he’s teaching us what it looks like to have a heart that is gripped by and ablaze with passion for the gospel that he has expounded in these 11 chapters. There are three gauges in particular that I want us to look at this morning in this doxology that help us test how strongly our hearts are under the influence of the theology of the gospel. Is my heart being gripped by gospel truth? Is my heart strongly under the influence of gospel theology? We know we’re living under the powerful influence of the gospel when we’re

- diving deeper
- doubting and demanding less
- depending more

Let’s look at these three gauges together.

### 1. **We’re Living Under the Influence of the Gospel when We ‘re Diving Deeper into God**

Paul’s doxology begins with a single syllable but it’s potent with meaning. Do you see it there in verse 33? “*Oh...*” It’s an exclamation. In fact, there are three exclamations in verse 33 that open up this doxology to us. I wonder, does your worship of God cause you to exclaim, “Oh!” to God? Does your worship of God sound more like a shout or a snore? Are there exclamations of praise that arise from your heart when you consider the wonders of God’s grace, redemption and holiness? This true worship demands intensity. That’s why Paul starts with the exclamation, “Oh!” “*Oh, the depth...*”

I heard a preacher named Sam Storms say these words:

- “You were made to be enchanted, enamored and engrossed with God.
- Enthralled, enraptured and entranced with God.
- En-ravished, excited and enticed with God.
- Astonished, amazed and awed with God.
- Astounded, absorbed and agogged with God.
- Beguiled and bedazzled.
- Startled and staggered, smitten and stunned, stupefied and spellbound.
- Charmed and consumed.
- Thrilled and thunderstruck.

- Obsessed and preoccupied.
- Intrigued and impassioned.
- Overwhelmed and overwrought.
- Enthused and electrified.
- Tantalized, mesmerized, monopolized.
- Fascinated, captivated, intoxicated, infatuated and exhilarated with God.”

That’s why we exist and why we were created. That’s why we were redeemed. As Paul ponders God’s unfolding plan of salvation, he ends with all of these adjectives packed into that little syllable, “Oh.” All these words describe how Paul feels about God at this point. He’s been contemplating the gospel and the first words out of his mouth are, “*Oh, the depth...*”

You know this gospel is gripping your heart and you’re living under its influence when you’re diving deeper and deeper into it. In this first phrase Paul, exclaims the depth of God’s wealth, wisdom and knowledge. It was His wisdom that planned our salvation and designed it personally for those whom He foreknew in His electing love. It was His wealth that freely lavished that salvation upon us. Paul looks at God’s wealth, riches and His wisdom and knowledge, and marvels at the depth of it—the bottomless depth of it.

There probably was no one who had greater insight into the mysteries of the gospel than Paul. No one has expounded it more brilliantly. Yet at the end of his exposition, Paul is compelled to exclaim that there are infinities and immensities to this gospel that are beyond even his mind. He’s compelled to exclaim that there are treasures here that he has yet to explore and mines that he has yet to unearth. There are riches of wisdom that are far beyond the reach of his finite mind. So he says, “*...the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!*”

He goes on to two more exclamations in verse 33. “*How unsearchable are his judgments...*” God’s judgments here are His plans and decisions—the way He executes His plans. Paul says, “They’re unsearchable. I can’t fathom them. I’d never be able to investigate them enough. There’s no amount of examination that could bring me to a full understanding of this. I could study the rest of my life and I’d never get to the bottom of this gospel.”

God’s judgments are profound. They are mighty, great and deep. I think of that hymn,

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!  
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!

Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love  
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!

(O The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus by S. Trevor Francis & Thomas J. Williams)

Paul says, “God, Your plans are beyond me. I never would have thought of this. Whoever would have thought of this?” The story of the gospel is the story of all stories—the greatest story ever told. No one could ever have designed it. No human mind could have ever conceived it. It would have never even entered into our imagination to design a salvation where God sends His own Son in the likeness of sinful man in order to condemn sin in the flesh and to raise us up to newness of life. We would have never designed a salvation that’s totally by grace through faith in Jesus alone yet it’s true. How unsearchable are His judgments, decisions and plans!

Lastly, Paul says, “...*how inscrutable his ways!*” That’s how the ESV translates it. Other versions say, “His ways are past finding out.” They’re far beyond our thoughts. We’ll sing today, “His pathways no man can trace.” The idea behind this exclamation is of a hunter tracking down an animal. He follows the footprints and if he perseveres long enough, he will ultimately find his prey. He will track him down.

Paul is saying that God’s ways are untraceable. You can’t track them down. “He plants His footsteps in the sea.” Just when you think you’ve got God figured out, you discover you’re not even close. For all eternity you will continue to discover that God’s ways are beyond finding out. There are infinite immensities of wonder in God that will never be exhausted.

I love how Job speaks of this in Job 26:14. He’s thinking about creation and God’s power over the wind and the seas. Then Job just says these words: “*Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?*”

We just touch the outskirts of God’s ways! We just hear a whisper, yet we’ve gone further than Job and have seen more than Job ever saw. We’ve seen God send His Son into the world. There too, “His ways are past finding out.”

- We would have sent God’s Son into a palace, but God sent Him into a manger.
- We would have given Him wealth and popularity, but God gave Him poverty and obscurity.
- We would have made Him a great philosopher, but God made Him a carpenter.
- We would have had Him conquer through power, but God had Him suffer in weakness and triumph through death on a cross.

There are still many things we do not understand about God. His ways are past finding out. They're His ways, not man's. In that we rejoice because if God's ways were like our ways, not a single person would ever be saved and our salvation would not be secure. Paul marvels at the depth of God's wealth and wisdom; at the unsearchableness of His judgments; at the inability of us to track down and trace God's ways. He says, "*Oh, the depth...*"

What wisdom once devised the plan  
Where all our sin and pride  
Was placed upon the perfect Lamb  
Who suffered, bled and died?  
The wisdom of a sovereign God  
Whose greatness will be shown  
When those who crucified Your Son  
Rejoice around Your throne.

(The Glory of the Cross by Bob Kauflin)

Is your worship of God taking you deeper and deeper into these depths? In this church we love to say, "You never move on from the gospel; only into a more profound understanding of it." Are you diving deeper into the infinities and immensities of God?

I was convicted while reading this confession of C.S. Lewis some years ago. He said, "This is my endlessly recurrent temptation: to go down to that sea—that sea of God's immensity—and there neither dive nor swim nor float, but only dabble and splash." What's your worship like? Are you diving? Are you at least swimming in the sea? Or are you just dabbling and splashing at the edges of God? Dive in! When you dive deeper in, you know that it's the influence of God's grace in the gospel taking you deeper into the fullness of Jesus Christ.\*

## **2. We're Living Under the Influence of the Gospel when We're Doubting & Demanding Less**

Secondly, we know that the gospel is exercising its influence over our lives when we find ourselves doubting and demanding less. Paul moves from three exclamations in verse 33 to three questions in verses 34 and 35. All three of these questions come from the Old Testament. The first is from Isaiah 40:13. Paul says it here in verse 34. "*For who has known the mind of the Lord...*"

There are reasons, strategies and purposes in God's mind that are inconceivable—unknowable—to us. Half of the time I don't even know my own mind, let alone God's. Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

(God Moves in A Mysterious Way by Puritan William Cowper, 1774)

Because those mines are so deep and beyond our knowing, we often doubt God and wonder what He's doing. The same hymn says,

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

The only One Who knows the mind of God is God.

The second question from Job 36 is, *"Who has been his counselor?"* In verse 34, Paul is telling us that God has never found Himself in a situation where He did not know what to do. He's never faced a challenge that He did not know how to handle. He's never once thought, "Oh, how I wish someone down there in St. Charles could give Me some advice." And yet, probably rarely a week goes by that we don't secretly wish we could give God some advice. Paul confronts the arrogance of our thinking! *"Who has been His counselor?"*

How often do we stand in judgment of God's purposes and ways? Have you ever wished that God would listen to you just this once? "If only He would just do what I say!" If for the next 24 hours, God were to hand over the reins of the universe to you, what kind of shape would we be in tomorrow?

I remember Pastor John Sale saying many years ago, "If I had God's power, I'd change a lot of things. But if I had God's power and His wisdom, I wouldn't change a thing." *"Who has been his counselor?"*

Finally, from Job 35:7 and 41:11, Paul states this question in Romans 11:35: *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"* Paul is underscoring that God does not owe any man anything. No one can place a demand on God and say, "God, because I've done this for You, I deserve this from You." The truth is we owe Him everything. We are the debtors to God's mercy. He is the Benefactor. We owe Him our lives—our all. You know that the gospel is exerting its strong influence over your life when you find yourself doubting Him less and demanding less from Him because you see the brilliant beauty of what He's done for you in Christ. And you say, "That's enough!"

There are a lot of things that I don't understand about what's happening in our lives. There are a lot of things in this world that are mysteries to me. There are disappointments, grief and pain. But this I know: "God did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up for me. How will He not also graciously give me everything I need in Christ?" (Romans 8:32). If He gave me Jesus, then I'm trusting that He's taking care of me right now, even if I don't understand His ways.

Is what God has given you in Christ enough to sustain you through the disappointments of this present age? You know the gospel is influencing you when you can say "yes," and when you can rejoice with joy that it's inexpressible and filled with glory because you're receiving the outcome of your faith as salvation of your soul.

### **3. We're Living Under the Influence of the Gospel when We 're Depending More on God**

Lastly, you know the gospel is exerting its strong, purifying, rest-producing influence over your life when you find yourself depending more and more on God, and trusting less and less in your own wisdom, resources and strength. Depending on Him, leaning on Him and trusting Him.

Paul moves from three exclamations to three questions, to a declaration and an acclamation in verse 36. At the beginning of verse 36, the declaration says, "*For from him and through him and to him are all things.*" All things in creation—and probably particularly in Paul's mind right now—are all things in the new creation and God's plan of redemption. One version says, "God is the source, the guide and the goal of all that is." He's the source of creation and redemption.

Where did all things come from? From God. Where did the new creation come from? It originated in God's mind. It is God's plan and gift. He is the Source, the Sustainer and Guide of creation and redemption. How did this creation come into being and remain in operation? Through God. It came from God and is sustained by God. Though we rejoice at all the scientific achievements and discoveries that the human mind has found, we must realize that behind it all stands a God Who holds the universe together by the word of His power. If He for a moment withheld that sustaining power from the universe, it would all fall apart. His mind is behind it all and it is His strength that sustains it all. It's all through Him. He is the goal of creation and redemption.

Why did God create all things and sustain all things? Why did He decide to restore a broken, fallen world and make it new in Jesus Christ? It's for Him and unto His everlasting

glory. Salvation is from God, through God and unto God's glory. *"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."* Since God is the source and the sustaining guide in the goal of our lives, we should gladly entrust all that we are, all that we have, all that we hope to be and all that we fear into His sovereign, faithful and merciful hands. The hymn says,

O God, we trust in You  
When tears are great  
And comforts few  
We trust in mercies ever new  
We trust in You.

(God Moves by Bob Kaufflin)

If we don't depend on Him and trust in Him, it's pride. John Stott says,

"Pride is behaving as if we were God almighty, strutting around the earth as if we own the place, repudiating our due dependence on God, pretending instead that all things depend on us, and thus arrogating to ourselves the glory that belongs to God alone."

It's all for His glory. What brings Him glory most is when we depend on Him from Whom all blessings flow.

*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?"*

*"Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?"*

*For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be glory forever. Amen.*

(Romans 11:33-36)

To Him be the glory forever! There's one more word. And the test of whether or not the gospel is exerting its strong influence over your life is whether you, from the heart, can utter this last word. When you ponder all that God has done in Christ, do you for a moment think, "You know, I kind of deserve that"? Do you ever think, "That's old news"? Or do you listen to the exposition of God's mercy, grace and glory in the gospel and say, "God, *from [You] and through [You] and to [You] are all things. To [You] be glory forever. Amen.*"?

So be it, Lord. When we say "Amen" to that doxology, we are saying, "God, I am nothing; You are everything."

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

(Rock of Ages by Augustus Toplady, 1776)

When you say, “Amen,” you acknowledge that Christ is all in all to you. You don’t deserve anything but hell, but you gladly delight in the lavish mercies and kindness that God has given you in Christ. *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

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