

Romans (11:33-36)

From Him, Through Him, To Him

Part 57 – December 18, 2005

OH, THE DEPTH!

As we come to the close of chapter 11, Paul ponders this sweeping plan of salvation that he's been inspired to record.

It's a plan so calculated, so complete, so comprehensive, so downright *clever*, that every Jew and every Gentile will have equal and unprecedented access to God's throne.

- And Paul is overwhelmed by the Lord's intentional strategy.
- And Paul is overwhelmed by the Lord's generosity and grace.

And it hits him hard; *everything* that has been planned has also been purposed to display the invincible, merciful glory of God.

And he steps back from his work, and praises God!

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. – *Romans 11:33-36 NIV*

You'd think he was at the end of the letter!

When Paul cries out: "Oh, the depth" he's expressing the infinite scope of God's riches and wisdom and knowledge.

Q: Ever throw a rock over a cliff or down a shaft to see how deep it is? You throw, you wait, and you hear it strike bottom.

Well, because of the nature of God's wealth and wisdom, there would only be two parts to that equation: you'd throw, and you'd wait. But it would never hit bottom ... because there simply isn't one.

The endlessness of God's wealth and wisdom is a key reason why eternal life won't become boring or grow stagnant.

- We will always be seeing more forever!

OH, THE RICHES!

Now let's talk about His limitless resources, or "riches". The Lord has three types of Immeasurable treasure:

A. God owns everything that is *not* God.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it ... - *Psalm 24:1 NIV*

If it's not God, it belongs to God!

B. God can create anything out of nothing.

Not only does He own everything that exists, but His resources are incalculable because the raw material He uses to make stuff is "nothingness" - and there's an infinite supply of nothing!

C. God Himself is the greatest treasure of all.

He doesn't need to create anything, or to possess anything, in order to be immeasurably wealthy ... because *He Himself* is the infinite Treasure of this dimension and the other!

Q: So, what does the "*depth of the riches*" mean to you and me?

Think of the Gateway Arch and the Space Needle. Structures like these could not stand if it weren't for the depth of their foundations. The reason we stand with absolute confidence in Christ is because the depth of our foundation is based in the infinite resource of God.

GOD'S WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE

He is the foundation and the explanation of all things.

Q: Do you know the difference between: "wisdom and knowledge"?

- Knowledge is the awareness of facts and data.
- Wisdom knows how to use them for a good goal.

Q: Have you ever known an "intelligent idiot" - someone who is very book-smart, but common-sense (or relationally) deficient?

In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. - *Colossians 2:3 NIV*

Nothing can be fully or rightly comprehended that is not known in relation to Jesus. He is the ultimate meaning of all reality.

TWO BIG MISTAKES

Now Paul asks two simple questions, quotes two OT scriptures, and reminds us of two big mistakes mankind routinely makes.

First, he asks:

Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? (11:34)

And he's quoting Isaiah 40:13:

Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? – *Isaiah 40:13 NIV*

Which brings up a tendency we all share: giving God instructions.

- Unbelievers may be stingy with faith, hope, and love.
- But, they are incredibly generous with their counsel!

This world is filled with God-advisors. But Paul is explicit that we *can not give – dare not give* - what proud sinners most often give. Not only advice on how He should run things, but threats of disbelief, if He doesn't do it our way!

Q: Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been His counselor?

- [No one!] No one advises the Almighty!

We are often confounded and perplexed by His methods and means. But it's not because He needs our assistance; it's because of the sheer depth of His wisdom and knowledge.

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (11:33b)

We can't offer Him advice He doesn't already know. And we can't give Him a gift He doesn't already own.

And this brings us to the second question Paul asks:

Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? (11:35)

Which Paul paraphrases from God's response to Job:

Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me. – *Job 41:11 NIV*

This brings up another tendency we share: bargaining with God.

- Mankind owes Him everything – He owes us nothing.

And yet, this world is filled with God-negotiators. But Paul is equally explicit that there is no way to put God in our debt. Every heartbeat is by His grace; every lung of air is a gift; every possession is on loan. We have no position from which to bargain!

Q: Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?

- [No one!] No one loans to the Lord!

FROM, THROUGH, TO

But there is something He *chooses* not to have without our permission: our love, obedience, and worship. And we know it ... and use it! "I'll go to church, read my Bible, and give up this or that, if You just answer my little request."

Q: But just how ignorant is it, to use what is in our *own* best interest as a bargaining chip with God?

It's like a dialysis patient "threatening" the doctor: "You hook me up to that machine one more time and I'm never comin' back!"

- We must not advise, negotiate, or threaten.
- We must simply trust ... all else is suicide.

The thing is, our lives will be lived *willingly* to the glory of God, or we'll serve His glory *unwillingly* in our own damnation.

For from him and through him and to him are all things (11:36a)

Everything originates from God, everything is sustained by God, and everything is destined to reveal the majestic love of God.

- Everything is from him, through him, and to him!

This is why it's impossible to discover the meaning and purpose of life by looking inward - within ourselves.

God is not just the foundation of life; he's the ongoing source of power and direction, and the ultimate destination. Let's proclaim that last line together:

To him be the glory forever! Amen. (11:36b)