

## Romans Part 38 – Chapter 11 & 12

Sunday, January 22, 2023

With input from Dr. Steven J. Lawson: <https://www.bibleref.com/Romans/11>,

### Review

Paul is wrapping up his argument that no one earns God's favor, no one earns God's love, no one earns their salvation (justification – our position of no condemnation before God). It is imperative that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God who takes away sin. Only his death on the cross pays for our sins and Jesus himself becomes that substitute for our punishment.

Paul then concludes with verse 32 in chapter 11:

*32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*

### Romans 11:33-36:

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.

We are reminded of **Isaiah 40:13** and **Isaiah 55:8-9**:

### Isaiah 40:13

*Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,  
Or as His counselor has taught Him?*

### Isaiah 55:8-9:

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.  
9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

**Dr. Steven J. Lawson:** In these verses, we come to the closing doxology of Romans chapters 1 through 11. The Apostle Paul has just given us the most comprehensive instruction on the gospel of Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in the Bible. The Apostle Paul has taken us from the depths of total depravity and begun the climb up the gospel of grace through justification by faith alone, and through sanctification, and glorification, and election, and predestination. And now, as we come to the end of Romans 11:33 to 36, we have climbed the Mount Everest of truth.

We have climbed the Mount Everest and scaled the heights of the gospel of God as the Apostle Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, has unleashed his theological genius and has recorded for us the most systematic presentation of the gospel. We now stand at the very pinnacle as we come to this doxology, and here we have the highest and the loftiest vantage point of the entire book of Romans and the entire gospel of God's grace. From this highest apex, we have the greatest perspective.

In verses 33 to 36 is what we call a doxology. A doxology is a short, condensed anthem of praise. It is theologically rich, it is emotionally charged, and it is filled with wonder and amazement that just comes pouring out of the heart of the Apostle Paul as he is astonished at this truth that he has just presented to us, and he wants you and me to be astonished as well. Paul opens up his heart and lets this praise for God come gushing out like a mighty current of wonder and worship for God. And it is intended to cause our hearts to be ignited with worship for God.

As we look at this doxology it is like putting your toe into the ocean of God's amazing grace. An outline for verses 33 to 36, would be: verses 33 and 34, "The Inscrutability of God." In verse 35, "The Autonomy of God." In verse 36a, "The Sovereignty of God," and then finally in 36b, "The Glory to God."

So, first, "The Inscrutability of God" in verses 33 and 34. And as we look first at verse 33, it's really two exclamatory statements. It's two sentences that end with an exclamation point. And as Paul writes this, his own heart is leaping out of his chest. Paul is not stoic here, he is not mundane here. Paul is filled with enthusiasm for God. And by the way, the word "enthusiasm" is two Greek words en theos, "in God," in all true excitement, at the highest level is "in God" and that's exactly where Paul is here. He can scarcely contain himself as he bursts forth with praise for God.

Look at verse 33. He begins, "Oh," and that just is a word of deep emotion. "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" An exclamation point has been supplied by the translator into the English language. As Paul's soul wells up with deep emotion, there is a depth to the grace of the gospel that Paul has just recorded in Romans 1 through 11 that he is just overwhelmed. It is a depth, he can't even see the bottom of it. It is a bottomless depth without end, without bottom, to the grace of God in the gospel.

And when he says "riches," "Oh, the depth of the riches," the vast, immeasurable wealth contained in the riches of God, it staggers Paul's mind. We would say it blows his mind, he is awestruck. And I trust that you and I are awestruck with the grace of God. And if we're not, we just don't get it. We have missed the message if we're not overwhelmed in our mind and in our heart and soul. "Oh, the depths of the riches," the vast riches, "both of the wisdom and knowledge of God."

When Paul says "the wisdom of God" here, he's talking about the infinite genius of God that is contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The brilliance of God to design the gospel in order to rescue unworthy, perishing sinners from eternal punishment. This wisdom of God is contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And just think of this vast wisdom of God just in the virgin birth, in the hypostatic union of Christ, that He was truly God and truly man. Who but God could have thought of this? In the active obedience of Christ to keep the law of God on our behalf, we who were lawbreakers, who but God in His wisdom could have designed this?

Think of the cross, think of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. There you see the wisdom of God. None of us would have ever dreamed up the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all of our sins would be transferred to the innocent Lamb of God. We would have never thought of this, but God did in His wisdom that He reconciled holy God to sinful man through the blood of the cross, there's the wisdom of God. And that He would be taken down from the cross, buried, raised on the third day, ascended to the right hand of God the Father. Only the wisdom of God could have designed this. It would have never entered our minds, not in a million years.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 2 just for a moment, because this will shed even greater light and insight. Because the epitome of this wisdom is found in Christ and in Him crucified. And so in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, beginning in verse 7, he says, "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery," and this wisdom he laid out at the end of chapter 1, which is very simply "Christ and Him crucified." In fact, he said in chapter 2 verse 2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." There is the wisdom of God.

**1 Corinthians 2:1-9:** *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

*6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,*

*"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared for those who love him"—*

If you look back to chapter 1 and verse 18, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." What is the wisdom of God in Christ and Him crucified is utter foolishness to the carnal mind. And to the unconverted, darkened mind, when they hear the message of the cross it is foolishness. But for us who have now the mind of Christ, it is the jaw-dropping brilliance of God that we can be reconciled to God through the blood of the cross.

Look at **1 Corinthians 1:21:** "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached," and Paul uses foolishness there in a sarcastic way. It's foolishness to the world but in reality, it's the sheer genius and wisdom of God in the cross to save those who believe.

He says in verse 23, "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness." Verse 24, "But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." This is the wisdom of God in the power of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, come back now to chapter 2, 1 Corinthians 2, and verse 7, *“We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory,”* really meaning “to our good.” Verse 8, *“The wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood. For if it had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* Let’s just pause there for a moment. Even in the wisdom of God, He kept the rulers of the Roman Empire and the nation Israel in darkness so that Christ would be crucified, even that was the wisdom of God.

This is confirmed by **John 18:37**:  
*“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.*

*Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”*

And by **John 19:11**:  
*Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.*

Then Paul is quoting Isaiah 66 verse 4, and Isaiah 65 verse 17, it’s a verse you’re very familiar with but you’ve probably not seen it in context. *“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which has not entered the heart of man. All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”* We normally hear this read at a funeral, and normally hear it referred to as what is awaiting us in heaven. That’s not in the context, that’s not in the passage. What this is talking about is the wisdom of God in the gospel of Christ crucified. Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and it has never entered into the heart of man this wisdom of God to save sinners by the blood of the cross. So what verse 9 is telling us is the inscrutable wisdom of God has designed the cross, and it would have never dawned on us that this would be the plan of salvation.

So as Paul is in Romans 11:33 and he says, *“Oh, the depth of the wisdom,”* this is what he’s talking about, the wisdom of Christ and Him crucified, the wisdom that God can be both just and the justifier, that God can save sinners yet in no way forfeit His righteousness by failing to punish sin. He has punished our sin in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God in His wisdom designed the plan of salvation in the gospel, God was all-knowing, and He took into account every conceivable possibility and every detail and every person who would ever be conceived in the womb and every circumstance of human history, and nothing escaped His knowledge as God took into account every conceivable possibility that lay before Him as He laid out the various options for all of human history and for saving human history, nothing was outside of His knowledge.

And in His wisdom, He designed the perfect, not only plan of salvation in the gospel, but the perfect plan for human history. And all of the circumstances and all of the events in all of the centuries by which He would bring salvation to those whom He will save, God chose the one best plan at the right time, at the right place, with the right Savior, and only God could have designed this. No wonder Paul says, *“Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.”* And as He looks into this mystery that has been now made known to us, he is overwhelmed. As we consider the height and the depth and the breadth and the length of the love of God towards us in Christ Jesus that has been manifested in the gospel in all of these extraordinary doctrines – propitiation, justification, reconciliation, expiation, and regeneration, adoption, all of that – that there would be...we would be overwhelmed in adoration for our great God.

Paul now follows up with the second half of verse 33, and there's another sentence that ends in an exclamation point. And the exclamation point is added by the translator into our English language that reflects the intensity of feeling that is welling up in the heart of the Apostle Paul and is contagious and spreads to us this morning. He goes, "*How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*" The second half of verse 33 actually is a restatement of the first half of verse 33, as he's just drilling down deeper, it's like Paul just can't let it go. He has to underscore the emotions that are welling up in him as he is writing this verse.

The second half begins with "how," and that really parallels the "Oh!" "How" indicates the strong emotion that grips his soul. True Christianity has this dimension of emotion. I think too many times we are so scared of emotions in our Christian life because we've seen the abuse of hyper-emotionalism that we have swung the pendulum so far in this other direction that we've ended up becoming a bunch of library nerds, that we've just become stoic followers of Christ, and we think our emotions should be neutered. No, that is absolutely wrong. Here we see Paul fired up by the gospel of God's grace, and I need to be fired up, you need to be fired up. If not, something is wrong with our soul. If this doesn't light you up, then you need to reexamine really where you are in your walk with the Lord, because as Paul writes this, he literally can hardly contain himself.

"How unsearchable are His judgments," let's just look at these words. "Unsearchable" means that they are utterly incapable of being investigated to the full. We can only scratch the surface of this. Look at the word "unfathomable," "how unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" This word "fathomable" means that cannot be traced out by man, and it comes from a Greek word for "footprint," like you see someone walking on the beach and leaving footprints. And putting the prefix "un" in front of it means we can't follow these footprints. They go over the horizon and out of view, and they're beyond our comprehension. That's the idea here.

Paul is looking at the footprints here in Romans 1 through 11, tracing God's grace again from the valley of depravity to the heights of sovereign election, Paul can't keep up with the mind of God, the genius of God that's being unfurled before him, and he can only see just a little ways in front of him. We think of **Deuteronomy 29:29**: "*The secret things belong to God, but the things revealed belong to us,*" and what's been revealed to us is less than even the tip of the iceberg. The vastness of what is below the surface that we cannot even see of how God has all of this wired beneath the surface, it's just unsearchable, it is unfathomable. And those two words really parallel "the depth of the riches" in the first part of verse 33. So Paul is just stacking up, one on top of the next, superlatives to attempt to express the infinite riches that are found in the gospel of grace.

So, let's look at these two words, "judgments" and "ways." We're still in verse 33, "How unsearchable are His judgments." The word "judgments" here really has a broader meaning, it's not referring simply to the final judgment. It's really referring to all of God's sovereign, executive decisions. It's really referring to the eternal purpose of God that takes into account everything that God chooses to do. It's really synonymous with what we saw in **Romans 8:28**: "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.*"

That word “purpose,” prothesis, just means “the eternal decree of God,” the eternal purpose and plan of God that is all inclusive of everything that comes to pass from eternity past to eternity future. As Paul has just walked us through sovereign election and predestination and effectual calling and justification, all the way into glorification, it’s as if Paul, obviously he can’t wrap his mind around the totality of all of this, and he’s just reduced to a statement like this, “How unsearchable...unsearchable are His judgments.”

And then he says, “unfathomable His ways.” “Ways” here referring to the path that God has chosen to take. And remember “unfathomable,” meaning those footsteps that just are lost on the horizon, Paul says the way that God has chosen to save a people out of the fallen human race who were in Adam but who are now saved in Christ, Paul says that road that God has chosen to travel throughout the centuries, it just cannot be traced out, you cannot get to the bottom of it. And so, I trust that as we have just gone through verse 33 that there would be a sense in which your mind would feel like a little thimble, and the infinite genius and wisdom and knowledge of God would be oceans of brilliance, and there’s no way it can fit into this little thimble.

So, let us be in awe of God. Let us be awestruck by God. Let us feel small, let God be big.

Now this leads us to verse 34, and Paul follows up but by quoting Isaiah 40 verse 13. It says, “For who has known the mind of the Lord,” let me just tell you that’s a rhetorical question. The answer for which is “no one.” No one has known the mind of the Lord, not all of the mind of the Lord. We know a little bit of what He has revealed in Scripture, but really the comprehensive mind of God, no one has known the mind of God. And then he follows up with a second question, “or who became His counselor?”

Isaiah 40 is a monumental chapter that marks a dramatic change in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah, chapters 1 through 39, have been filled with judgment upon Israel, Damascus, Samaria, Philistia, Moab, Ethiopia, Egypt, Tyre, Judah and all the nations. And all of a sudden, as we come to Isaiah 40 verse 1, the tone and the trajectory of Isaiah suddenly shifts. In fact, liberal theologians actually think that there was a second Isaiah, a Deutero-Isaiah, who wrote Isaiah 40 to the following, because it couldn’t have come from the same man, it’s so dramatically different. Well, we know that it is the same Isaiah because he comes now to the message of the gospel of grace.

In verse 1 he says, “‘Comfort, O comfort My people,’ says your God, ‘Speak kindly to Jerusalem.’” It’s a double comfort that He offers, and it comes in what he says in verse 2, “Her iniquity has been removed, that she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all of her sins.” That means double forgiveness for all of her sins. Where sin does abound, grace does much more abound. And Isaiah now begins to record the message of God’s grace in the gospel. And so he says in verse 3, “A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness.’” We know this would be ultimately fulfilled in John the Baptist who would preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and he’s preparing a way for the coming of Christ who would say, “Repent and believe in the gospel.”

Then in verse 6 and 7, “*The grass withers.*” “*What shall I call out?*” *All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.*” This is a reference to both human life and human wisdom. It’s here today gone tomorrow. It springs up in the morning and by the time the noonday sun comes, whatever little tiny shoot of green springs up, it just wilts under the hot arid sun in the Middle East. It speaks of the shortness of life, and the suddenness of death and the length of eternity. But it also speaks the same of man’s little puny wisdom that he would have to solve his own problems.

*“The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it.”* Surely the people are grass, they’re just nothing, and their own solutions to life’s problems are nothing. Who I am, where I came from, where I’m going, what is life about, what is death, what lies on the other side of death? Man doesn’t have a clue to any of the real issues of life. Only God can answer and address those issues. So he says in verse 8, *“The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”* And contained in the Word of God is the gospel of God that Paul laid out in Romans 1 through 11.

What are we supposed to do with this “word of our God that stands forever?” He says in verse 9, *“Well, get yourself on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news (GOSPEL),” “Lift up your voice mightily, bearer of good news. Lift it up and say, ‘Here is your God!’”* The inscrutability of God, the autonomy of God, the sovereignty of God, everything, the grace of God that’s packed into Romans 1 through 11, he is saying, “Shout it from the housetops, take it to the streets, tell everyone of this gospel of grace that there is double forgiveness for all of our sins.”

So, he says in verse 10, *“Behold, the Lord God will come with might,”* He will come with might to save and to redeem and to reconcile. And all of that was accomplished in the Person and work of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. All of this is pointing ahead to the coming of Christ.

Now, look in verse 11, *“Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,”* this is speaking of the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, *“In His arms He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom. He will gently lead the nursing ewes, the little baby lambs.”* It speaks of the Good Shepherd who would come by the eternal will of God and be born of a virgin, live a sinless life, die upon a cross, be buried, be raised from the dead, ascend to the right hand of the Father, and whoever calls upon the Lord Jesus Christ, He is mighty to save His sheep, He laid down His life for His sheep.

So we come to verse 12, *“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,”* the answer to that is “no one.” *“And marked off the heavens by the span?”* The answer to that is no man can even begin to measure the outer reaches of outer space. *“And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales?”* The answer to that is no one has done it because only the inscrutable, incalculable wisdom and knowledge of God could have designed the entire universe and is now micromanaging the entire universe.

There’s not a sparrow that falls apart from the Lord. Every hair of our head is numbered by the Lord. He’s causing all things to work together for good. He knows where every germ is right now on this entire planet, on this coronavirus. He has everything masterminded according to His eternal purpose and plan. And all of this is building up to verse 13, *“Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,”* and here the argument goes beyond physical creation and physical providence to the affairs of the spiritual kingdom of God to save lost sinners out of this fallen world. *“Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,”* we could add, *“in the gospel of grace.”* The answer is “no one.” *“Or as His counselor has informed Him.”* It’s laughable to think that any of us have had any input into what God’s doing in the world right now.

Verse 14, “With whom did He consult, and who gave Him understanding?” Again, the answer is “no one.” “And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge?” The answer is “no one.” “And informed Him on the way of understanding?” Again, the answer is “no one.” And specifically here, it is dealing with the gospel of grace. God has consulted no one on how to save you, God is taught by no one in how even to order the affairs of your life by which the gospel was brought to you where you were.

So this pivotal point in Romans then leads us to “So what do we do now?”

### **Romans 12:1-8:**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

*6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*