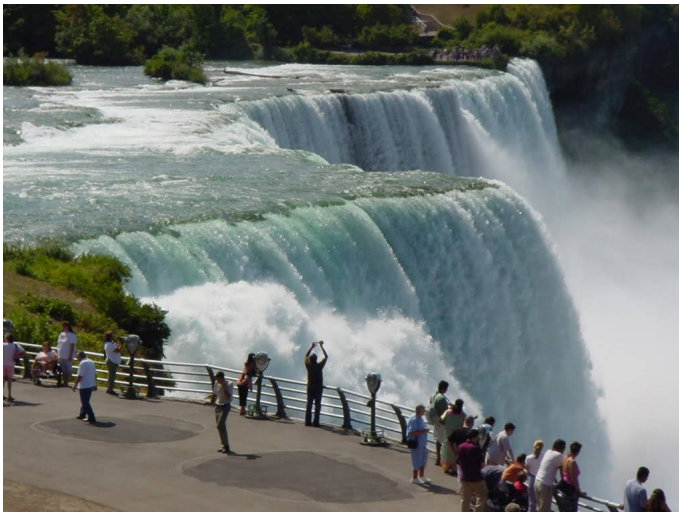




ROMANS ^{Part 111}

Chapter 11:33-36

The superlative qualities of God



O, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways! 34 For, who knew the mind of the Lord? Or, who became His adviser? 35 Or, who gives to Him first, and it will be repaid him? 36 Seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen!

We have several penloads of truth here from the writing instrument of our apostle and his favorite scribe Tertius. Paul does not

taper off at the end of this chapter, but rather detonates a bomb in verse 36 with the most comprehensive statement in the entire Word of God. No divine penman ever said more in fewer words than Paul does in Romans 11:36. As for myself, I'll be gradually building up to the explosion, burning the fuse by increments.

“O”

The initial interjection here of Paul in verse 33 (“O”) results from what went before. Whenever Paul starts a sentence with “O,” I believe that he means, “O.” Paul is beside himself; he’s temporarily out of normal words containing more than one letter. Again, this is because of the previous statement (verse 32) that issued involuntarily from the man while writing under inspiration. The presence of the “O” tells me that the previous statement took Paul as much by surprise as it would, eventually, the rest of the world.

“For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. O, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways!”

STUBBORNNESS AND MERCY

Few Bible readers today accept the fact that God locks up all together in stubbornness. Fewer still believe that He will be merciful to the same all. Paul himself never accepted it in his previous life as a Pharisee. He had no idea then of God’s control over all humanity. He had no idea of The Big Plan to rescue the entire human race from sin and death. Even if he had entertained any of these thoughts, the connection was never made that, in order to be rescued from sin and death, the race must be first deliberately captured by these very things. The thought that, to ensure the beginning and the end of



The Big Plan, God must necessarily enact both ends—the stubbornness and the mercy—never pierced even the perimeter of Paul’s institutional world and heart. But now here he was, the divinely-chosen spokesman of both things: the God-inspired stubbornness and the ensuing mercy; the control of God over every human being ever created. What else could the man say, really, but “O.” And then this: “The depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways!”

WORDS FAIL, BUT PAUL TRIED ANYWAY

It should go without saying God is wise and knowledgeable. In fact, to call Him “knowledgeable” is the understatement of the eons. To call Him “wise” is absurd—so obvious is it. To say that God is “rich” is unutterably stupid. The only thing that could make all of this any more ridiculous would be to add the adjective “deep” to it, which is just what Paul does. The only thing Paul has at his disposal, with which to describe God, is words, so he throws all the words he has at the enterprise. They fail epically, one after another. But Paul soldiers on. He’s hampered by adjectives, nouns, verbs

and definite articles in his attempt to categorize the infinite, yes, but he is willing to make a fool of himself by launching his tiny little syllables at Mt. Everest.

INSCRUTABLE AND UNTRACEABLE

The nuts and bolts of God’s judgments are much too complicated for humans to fathom. We can see and grasp the outcome of God’s judgments, but are not privy to God’s internal deliberations. It would be like an ant contemplating—or attempting to contemplate—the workings of a Swiss timepiece. The ant can ride the second-hand of the watch around the dial, but the sensation of motion is the extent of its awareness. This parable and the verse inspiring it answers the ludicrous question of people who wonder how God can keep track of everything—all the details of life—while weaving every event together into a flawless, perfectly-meshed tapestry. No one will ever deduce *how* this happens, thus the words “inscrutable” and “untraceable.” But certainly we can know *that* God does it. That is, we can grasp God’s purpose. We can see where He’s going. And so we should, for He announces where He’s going. And if our eyes are open, we can see that He is moving steadily and purposely toward His predetermined destination.

ALL IS OUT OF, THROUGH, AND FOR GOD

A.E. Knoch's commentary on Romans 11:36 is outstanding—

This is the most comprehensive statement which can be uttered. God is the source of all, the channel of all, and the object of all. The universe sprang out of Him, it has its course in Him, and He will be its ultimate. This settles all speculation as to the origin of all things. Creation is out of God, not out of nothing. This explains universal history. God is the One back of all the movements of mankind. This reveals the goal of all things. God is so guiding all His creatures that, eventually, He will become their All. To Him, indeed, be glory for the eons!

Romans 11:36 reads beautifully out of the Amplified Version—

For from Him [all things originate] and through Him [all things live and exist] and to Him are all things [directed].

These are the simplest words that can be uttered. Even a child can understand them. Few adults, however, believe them. We may find some who will be willing to admit that all is out of God. It is hard to argue against the fact that God is the source of all things and that things cannot generate themselves. Atheists manage the argument, but it is evident that they have not even convinced themselves. But now is where human beings lose the three-part avowal of divine sovereignty and become tangled in their own web of pride. (O, the web of pride.) Very few believe that all



things live and exist through God, or because of God. Most human beings are too conceited to confess this, conferring upon themselves powers that they do not possess. Christianity has one God for good, another for evil. Neither one is sovereign because, according to the theory, every human being possesses his or her own realm of sovereignty. God cannot interrupt either the decisions or the acts of any human holder of such sovereignty. This is how tiny and insignificant the Christian God is. God gave away his sovereignty to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and he has yet to get it back. It must be his deepest regret.

Anyone believing the final clause of this glorious triplet, “to Him all things are directed,” are lonely people indeed. They shout their invitation for fellowship into the gigantic, near-empty auditorium of faith in God that is this world, to be met only by the echoes of their own entreaty. Few have faith in God. Most of humanity either believes that there is nothing after this life (this is the belief of worldly people), or that everyone except them will be either annihilated or eternally tormented (this is the belief of religious people). Yet those who are believers believe all three stark and sparkling declarations of Romans 11:36. Strangely, it requires a miracle of faith to believe such simple declarations.

EVERYTHING REALLY IS OUT OF HIM,
THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM;
EVERYTHING

Teachers of the Word are ever being told, “You must consider the context.” Exactly right. In Romans 11:36, the apostle Paul makes one of the most startling pronouncements a human can make concerning God: “Out of Him and through Him and for Him is all.” It has become fashionable in certain circles (some claim to have a “new revelation”) that, absolutely speaking, all is *not* out of God. The context of Romans chapter 11, we are told, is Israel. In this chapter of Scripture, Paul indeed speaks of Israel. But at the end of this chapter, in verses 33-36, Paul departs from the Israel context to make a sweeping pronouncement concerning the God *of* Israel: “O, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways! For, who knew the mind of the Lord? Or, who became His adviser? Or, who gives to Him first, and it will be repaid him? Seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen!”



The context we must consider is the immediate one (“consider the immediate context” is a rule of Scriptural interpretation), focusing on the phrase, “seeing that.” This is the key phrase, because what Paul says after this depends upon the truth of what went before. For instance, I might say, “Who can know my thoughts on this matter, seeing that I have not yet uttered a word?” No one can know my thoughts because (“seeing that”) I have not yet uttered a word. Now take this back to Romans. “Who knew the mind of the Lord?” It is a rhetorical question; the answer is obviously, “no one.” “Who became His advisor?” Again, the question is rhetorical; obviously, no one advises God. Then this final question: “Who gives to Him first?” This is the most unimaginable “possibility” of all, for God receives nothing from anyone first. So now watch: “... seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all.”

The all that is out of God is related (“seeing that”) to the nothing that anyone can give Him first. If the “nothing” could become “something,” only then would the “all” not be everything. Why? Because the phrase “seeing that” vitally relates these clauses. Likewise, if the

“nothing” of the former clause is absolute (and it is), then so is the “all” of the subsequent clause. This brief passage of Romans 11:33-36 proves logically (to the sound mind) that everything that exists and everything that happens is, indeed, out of God. Otherwise, someone has given something to Him first. If it can be proven that someone has given something to God that He didn’t already possess (impossible), only then can it be proven—using this passage—that all is not out of God (impossible). Jim Coram of the Concordant Publishing Concern puts it this way in his article titled, “To God Be All The Glory”—

It is clear, then, that in this passage the thought is that, all that is, and all that happens, is out of, through, and for God. The words “the all,” in any text, refer to all that is in view, all that is comprised in the subject at hand, or true in the nature of the case. Therefore, by means of the illuminating rhetoric which Paul employs in this marvelous passage, he clearly manifests the universal scope of that which brings glory to God for the eons. That these words are used in a limited way in certain other passages (e.g., Col. 3:8), is quite irrelevant. The question is: What is the scope of “the all” in Romans 11:36? Outside of God Himself (cp “it is evident that it is outside of Him Who subjects all to Him . . .”; 1 Cor.15:27), there is no exception to this “all” of Romans 11:36, nor can there be. For if just once, even concerning a trivial matter, someone had already known His mind when He as yet had not informed him, or if at any time someone had advised Him of something of which He had hitherto been ignorant, or had given something to Him first that He had not already dispensed, then indeed some things would not be out of God. But since Paul’s whole point is that such an idea could never be true, we can be sure that “all” is used universally in this passage.

—MZ

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Thank you to all who have emailed me to tell me that you enjoy my work, or to ask a question, or just to say, “Hello!” I am behind again on my email, but I read everything that is sent me, and your words keep me going. Also, thank you for your continued contributions to help keep this messenger doing what he does. I promise you that I will continue in this work until my last breath, Grace and peace and thanks to all of you. —Martin