

God Owes Me Nothing! Romans 11:33-36

We have been going through this glory statement by Paul after he has gone through the amazing truths of God concerning our salvation. And if you are a believer you can relate to Paul here, in that he has to stand back after articulating these truths and just say "Oh!" He is just overwhelmed with God. And we might have had that experience in the knowledge of God while listening to a sermon, or reading a book about the truths of God rooted in the Scripture or just studying through a passage of Scripture, but you have to break out in glorious and delightful praise to God. Your heart just cannot contain the joy of God that you have to worship and praise him.

And Paul names three attributes specifically that he praises God for, and they are his riches, his wisdom and knowledge. And then last time we were together we started to look at the rhetorical questions that Paul asks in verses 34-35. There are three questions and they relate to the three attributes just mentioned but Paul handles them in reverse order. His knowledge, wisdom and riches. But he asks the questions from a different angle because he compares our character and resources to God. And all the questions should have a negative response. And last time we were together, we looked at the first two questions, which are a quote taken from Isaiah 40:13 which is an amazing chapter about the bigness and glory of God. But look at the first question, **"For who has known the mind of the Lord?"** And the answer is no one. None of us knows what God knows. None of even comes close to the knowledge of God. The more that we learn about how exhaustive and great God's knowledge is the more it should humble us, and cause us like Paul to glory and delight in God.

The second question, **"or who has been his counsellor?"** When we think of the wisdom of God in sustaining all that he has made and orchestrating salvation, and the wonders of his divine plan there is none of us that can counsel God. It is the height of arrogance that we could ever correct God or give him some insight that he needs. To think that proves how little we know of God in his glory. So who has given counsel to the Lord? And the answer is no one. It is so glorious and humbling at the same time.

Now today we come to the third question, **"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"** And this is such an important question because so often we work on the principle of debt. We might say that we are indebted to God for all that he has done for me, therefore I have to serve him. And certainly we understand the principle of debt in life. If we borrow money for a mortgage on a house or a loan for a vehicle we realize that we are indebted to the bank to make monthly payments to pay that off. But we never do it joyously or thankfully because in the end we will earn that house or vehicle because we will pay off the debt. Many people view their salvation in this way. God has given us the loan and we just have to pay it off so we serve him. That view has more in common with purgatory and working off your debt in a place of judgment after this life than it does with true salvation by grace alone in Christ alone - which is Paul's whole message of this book.

The other matter that this verse deals with is how easily it is for us to slip into God is indebted to me, or God owes me and not even realize it. It is the attitude that does not understand this praise of God because it has a big self and a small God. I remember talking to an individual several years ago who was going through deep

struggles and pain in his life, and kept asking the question “why?” And for all of us who go through struggles as believers we often ask the question “why” and it drives us to the word of God or the God of the word to answer that reason. But his “why” was asked from a different place. He said to me, “after all I have done, all the church services, Bible passages that I have read, prayers that I have offered, things that I have done for God, how could he ever do this to me?” The question “why” was asked from the vantage point that God was somehow indebted to him to give him a problem free life for how he served God. And it is amazing how often we can be more impressed by our righteousness than the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

And in that moment, with that interpretation of our relationship with God this kind of praise and glory to God that Paul echoes here, and that we see echoed time and time again throughout the Book of Revelation when the saints are gather before Him cannot and does not exist. So I want us to meditate on this last question because so often in this section we can see the glory of God and the impotence of man in the first two but do not reflect of this third question. So let us look and see what this means and then draw some conclusions.

1. We need to understand the question. V.34.

I always love questions because even rhetorical questions where the answer is evident causes us to think. We can be drifting in and out of a sermon then a question is asked and our minds are reengaged. And questions not only cause us to give an answer but so often even ponder the answer. And the answer here is not only the vast richness of God but two things. One is our absolute poverty before a holy God, which is a blessing when we realize it. Jesus says in the Beatitudes in Matt. 5:3, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” We never think of poverty as a blessing but it is when we come before God. And the other thing we see here is how big and wonderful and necessary and glorious God’s grace is. God is a giving God. The more we see that grace the more that we are driven to serve him not out of debt but out of delight; out of sheer joy for who he is, and that is the essence of worship.

So look at our verse again, “**Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?**” This quote is taken from the Book of Job, and God is speaking in Job 41:11, “**Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.**” And isn’t the Book of Job a fascinating book? We realize that Job is an upright man and that loves God, Satan says if you afflict him he will curse God. So God allows Satan to take away his wealth and his children, and we have those famous words of faith that speak that God owns everything and everything belongs to him in Job 1:21, “**And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’**” He recognizes that everything that we have, every material possession and talent and blessing comes from him and he has the right to take it away. And then the next verse records, “**In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.**”

But then his health is taken away and his wife even counsels him to curse God and die. And listen to Job’s response in Job 2:10, “**But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**” He realized that

everything comes from God whether blessing or cursing - God is sovereign and the owner of all. But there is a subtle shift at the end of that verse, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." Job was a God fearing man who worshipped God. And as we go through this lengthy book, Job begins to complain. He wants his day in the court of God. This certainly has not because of some sin in Job's life that he suffered what he was going through. The beginning of the book makes that clear. But there is a complaint against God. Job is not getting what he deserves. And it goes on and on. His three friends try to convince him that he has some secret sin, and Job has no secret sin, but he becomes more adamant wanting God to answer and wanting his day in court.

Then God finally answers in chapter 38 through chapter 41 - four chapters. And listen to how God begins in 38:2-3, "**Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.**" Times of suffering we can think that not only are we more wise than God that we have a better plan but also we are more wealthy - in that we are more deserving or righteous. And for four chapters there are questions to Job about God's creation and the glory and the mystery of them from the sea monster to the various constellations to the birth of animals and the foundations of the world. And anytime you want to question God and his wisdom just read through all those questions. They will make you feel small. And the message is not only is God above us in wisdom and righteousness, but he created everything and owns everything. This is where this question comes in.

And Job is wonderfully and gloriously humbled beneath such power and wisdom. He responds in 42:2-6, "**I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.**" He is utterly undone but glories in the God of creation.

Well, here in this glory statement by Paul, he takes that language of Job and applies it to what he has just taught throughout the Book of Romans. Again, remember the main message of the opening five chapters. Salvation is not by works. Works would make God indebted to man and obligated to him. But remember what he says in 3:20, "**For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**" God is indebted to no one. That is why salvation is a gift of God's grace. Listen to verses 23-24 of that chapter, "**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.**" We have all sinned, and all have fallen short of the glory of God. Therefore justification, being declared righteous in his sight through simple faith is a gift of God and never a matter of debt. God does not owe us salvation. If he owed us salvation then salvation would be merit based and not grace based. This is what separates Christianity from every religion. Every religion says this is what you must do, Christianity says this is what Gods has done.

We can even see that with our election in chapter 9. Why did God choose you and me? And we want to come up with some reason in us. God choose me because of my giftedness or my personality or because of my love, but the moment we say that we make salvation a matter that we can give something that God needs. We can gift him. His resources and riches are not enough. Remember 9:11 why God chose Jacob over Esau, **“though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls.”** The meaning of not yet born is election just like our justification is completely by grace and not a matter of works. It is not a matter that God looks down the corridor or time and sees how loving we are or even that we would place our faith in Christ, no the choice is his and by his grace and his grace alone.

And both election and justification are humbling doctrines, but they both causes us to ask this question, **“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”** And the answer is no one. It is impossible! And the answer to that question becomes our hope, because if we are ever going to come into his presence clothed with righteousness then he must do it. He must send Christ and he must effect it in my life, and he must do it willingly and not on the basis of anything in us.

2. How do we apply this truth that God is not in the least indebted to us?

We can apply this in so many ways but one way is to realize that we are far too easily impressed by ourselves, rather than so wonderfully amazed at God that all we can do is follow Him. This is why this praise of Paul is so foreign to so many who claim the name of Christ. Think about it: how often do we complain about others - we find it so easy to gossip and slander for no other reason than to just do it. We are not trying to solve a problem and seeking to help others, but we just out of habit - backbite, slander and say all manner of evil against others. Our speech about others indicates how impressed we are in ourselves. God must have gotten it right when he chose me!

And yet the amazing thing about the Book of Romans is that it is personal. It is not written as dry theology but it exposes us for who we truly are. Romans 3:13-14 says of us, **“Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”** Why do we do that? The reason why is we are far too impressed with our righteousness and goodness and morality. The gospel exposes who we are. And it is amazing to look at congregations that are constantly exposed to doctrines like sin and total depravity, God’s wrath and justice, justification and the grace of God, God’s sovereignty and election. They are the congregations that are so often overwhelmed with God and joyously gather together, are willing to forgive the vilest offender, and why? It is because we are far more impressed by the God of the gospel and the ill-deserved grace that he has brought us. And let me ask you - do you find yourself complaining and back-biting against others? Has it even become a habit in your life? The glorious remedy is the Book of Romans - the opening eleven chapters. We need to rehearse these truths to ourselves until our home going. This book causes us to be glorious and amazingly impressed by the God of my salvation, so much so that we say

- Oh! And you cannot complain and gripe against any when you are glorying in his goodness to a sinner like me.

This even has application for forgiveness. So often individuals have been sinned against horrendously in their lives. And I have been asked on numerous occasions - how do I get past what they did or what they said? And they really do want to forgive. And the way that we forgive is not concentrating on what they deserve, or what forgiveness might cost me, but on what I deserve and what forgiveness cost our Lord. God sent his Son who is of eternal worth to pay the debt of sin I deserve. Romans 6:23, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** I deserve punishment but I get eternal life not because of my worth but because of His and his sacrifice on Calvary’s hill. If you start to understand the truths that Paul has articulated through these chapters so much so that it enters into praise like it does here, then you willingly and may I say joyfully grant forgiveness because of the amazing forgiveness that you have received.

Another application of this text and of these chapters is that we not only change how we talk about others and forgive other but how we talk about self. Think how we love to talk about self. For many they have always done more than others, suffered more than others, and have experienced more than others. You know how the conversation goes. Someone asks how you are doing, and you get one sentence out and they interrupt you to start talking about self. And it is easy to be condemning of others and it is not to say that we should not talk about our struggles or even talk about our triumphs to encourage others. But how much of our talk is really about self? How much is it about God and his grace and even seeking to minister and listen to others. We are far too impressed many times with our insights and gifts and talents. Paul says to the self righteous Corinthians who were impressed with their gifts and talents and abilities, and we might have talents in certain areas, but says, in 1 Corinthians 4:7, **“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”** And does Paul say here in Romans, God owns everything and everything belongs to him. Even if we makes strides in Christ-likeness it is not because of us but him. He owes you nothing!

And lastly, this passage is not saying we cannot give or serve God. Well, there is nothing I can give or do for God. It does the exact opposite - it causes us to serve him and give and be devoted to him from the depths of our being. The motivation is different though. If I can give something that God needs then it is about my greatness and getting God to be indebted to me. If God doesn’t need anything - if salvation from the beginning to the end is all of grace - then the reason why I serve and love and give is not to earn or say look at me but it is to say - look at him! It gives the highest motivation. In fact, beginning in chapter 12 Paul will give command after command in how we live and function as believers but they are all based on the height and depth and breadth of the truths taught in the opening 11 chapters about who we are and who the God of ur salvation is. It is the motivation for godly living and loving him and serving him.

Oh believer, we have walked on holy ground through these chapters. Glory in the one above. See the glory of the God of your salvation. It will change your life.