

To God Be the Glory Romans 11:28-36

Introduction

It is often overlooked in history – that some of the greatest scientists and most brilliant thinkers in history have also been men of faith

Blaise Pascal - mathematician / Johannes Kepler – astronomer / mathematician

Sir Isaac Newton – is credited with having discovered the laws of gravity and of motion / he he also developed aspects of modern mathematics such as calculus / and discovered the spectral properties of light

Newton also was a Christian and a firm believer in the Bible as the revelation of God - - - he said that he studied the Bible daily - - - and he became a student of biblical prophecy

His last work that he published was titled ‘Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John’

In this work – he made a prediction about the future – combining his understanding of the laws of motion with a particular prophecy in Daniel

Voltaire the 18th century French skeptic [who was also known for his intellect] chose to mock Newton for his belief in the Bible and poked fun at Newton’s prediction.

Voltaire: “Look at the mighty mind of Newton. When he got into his mental decline, he began to study the book called the Bible; and it seems, in order to credit its fabulous nonsense, we are supposed to believe (says Newton) that the knowledge of mankind will be so increased that we shall be able to someday travel at fifty miles per hour. The poor fool!”

That didn’t age well

William Newell: ‘Newton had been studying Daniel 12:4: “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” When he made this prediction.’

Some of you likely proved the accuracy of his prediction on your way to church this morning!

What would Voltaire think if he found out that the F-16 – fighter jet travels around 1500 mph at top speed?

Newton once sounded a bit like the Apostle Paul when he wrote,

Sir Isaac Newton: ‘The most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being.’

Creation itself – points us to the mind of God in His wisdom and knowledge

Paul – in Romans 11 has been contemplating God’s great program of redemption – involving both the Jew and the Gentile

He has noted that – in the current period – Israel is under a partial hardening from God – due to their rejection of Christ - - - and we are now in the period of the fullness of the Gentiles

But – Paul has told us – things will not remain this way - - - at a day yet future – the Deliverer will come from Zion and all Israel will be saved

Before moving forward – Paul reminds us of the purpose behind all genuine theology / all truth about God

It is to worship

Paul drops to his knees in doxology and gives glory and praise to God

Romans 11:33-36 - 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways . . . To Him be the glory forever. Amen.'

I. Mercy for All - vv. 28-32

Paul has just told us of a day in which there will be a conversion of national Israel in the future

But for – now – they are under a partial hardening

The Jews stand in a dual role as they exist today

Are they God’s chosen people or not? [Here’s the answer]

1. From the standpoint of the gospel – they have served as enemies / hostile to Christ / not only rejecting the gospel but actively opposing it / their house was left desolate / under God’s judgment / they were cut off of the olive tree / outside the church / their unbelief led to the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church
2. From the stand point of the Fathers [Abraham / Isaac / Jacob] – they are beloved – God has made unconditional promises regarding the nation that will be fulfilled in the future

Modern day Israel is a holding vessel for the future fulfillment of promises God made to the Fathers

God plays the long game

Consider biblical history – the focus of the OT and the gospels is almost exclusively upon the Jews from Genesis 12 forward – with the Gentiles entering the picture once in while – every now and then a straggler becomes a part of the people of God – like Ruth the Moabite or Rahab the Harlot / the repentance of Nineveh - - - but most often the Gentiles are simply either the enemies of Israel - - - or just left out of the panorama of redemptive history – worshipping their pagan deities / sun gods / moon gods / etc.

MLJ: 'Take a broad view of history . . . all those centuries, the Jews, the Jews, the Jews - and the Gentiles nowhere. Then suddenly this tremendous reversal, and now the Gentiles, the Gentiles, the Gentiles - and the Jews outside!'

God's redemptive story for over 1900 years – has been upon the Gentiles! - - - with the Jews being scattered – and cut off of the Olive tree

However - - - The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable – v. 29

What God promises He will perform

God has promised to give the descendants of Abraham the land of Israel / to seat a descendant of David on the throne of Israel - - - forever

God has not taken back those promises – they were unconditional when given

Generations of Israelites can forfeit their inclusion in those promises - - - but that does not make the promise null and void – they will be fulfilled

One commentator said God is not an Indian – giver [not supposed to say that anymore]

I remember one time I had traded some baseball cards with my friend Larry – who had apparently taken some cards from his older brother

Next thing you know – older brother comes over to my house and says – let me see your cards

Then he says – 'that's mine / that's mine / etc.' - - - and he took them back! [I was sad]

I wanted to tell Larry he was an Indian giver – but they weren't really his to give in the first place

God will not do that – He does not take back promises – He will fulfill them to the letter

An important term in the OT is the Hebrew word – *Berith* = a covenant – [a binding, sacred agreement or treaty] – Abrahamic / Davidic / New

On the human level – a covenant is essentially a promise
David once made a covenant with Jonathan

Jonathan said to David

I Samuel 20:15 - 'And you shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.'

Eventually Saul and Jonathan both died in a battle with the Philistines and David became king over Judah - - - then over all Israel

What David could have done – which would have been standard fare in the ancient world – was to kill off any descendants of the previous king

They are enemies / threats to his own reign

But – David does not do that

II Samuel 9:1 - 'Then David said, "Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?'

David wanted to keep his promise he made to Jonathan

They told him there is still a son of Jonathan crippled in both feet – Mephibosheth

He was brought to David

II Samuel 9:7 - 'And David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly.'

That's the power of a covenant

From the stand point of being a descendant of Saul – Mephibosheth could have been regarded as an enemy

From the standpoint of the covenant - - - He became an object of mercy

Paul goes on to make the point that – the only reason this national redemption of Israel will occur is because of the mercy of God

God showed mercy to the Gentiles – and has been showing mercy to Gentiles - - - and He will in turn – show mercy once again to the Jews

Neither side can make a claim before God that they deserve salvation or His blessings

We come as undeserving sinners or we do not come at all

Russel Dilday – writes of a man in his congregation – who ignored God and the church for a number of years – while his wife and kids attended. This man was busy sitting down at the country club – drinking and playing cards with the boys

He didn't need God - - - He was making good money

Then – one day – something got his attention. His daughter was in a car accident – involving a drunk driver - - - and was in a coma for several weeks at the hospital

This sobered up Mr. business man – he began going to back to church - - - and got serious about his relationship with God - - - and stayed that way after his daughter recovered

Sheldon Van Auken calls that 'a Severe Mercy'

It's mercy when God gets our attention and changes our eternal trajectory for good

This reflection upon the ways and purposes of God leads Paul to praise

II. An Outpouring of Praise - vv. 33-36

Paul can't help but break out into praise / doxology

God's program to set Israel aside for a time while He saves Gentiles – and then to bring Israel back in at the end of days – causes Paul to marvel at God's wisdom

There are a lot of things we could praise God for: His power / His love / His goodness

Paul begins by praising God for His wisdom!

Romans 11:33 - "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!"

When we see what God has done and is doing – we get a glimpse into the wisdom and knowledge of God

Tozer: 'Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means. It sees the end from the beginning, so there can be no need to guess or conjecture. Wisdom sees everything in focus, each in proper relationship to all, and is thus able to work toward predestined goals with flawless precision.' [The Knowledge of the Holy, p. 60]

God – in His wisdom – created the world

God knew the Fall would take place – that Adam and Eve would sin

Why did He create anyway?

In His wisdom – He devised a plan of redemption

God took all the evil of the world – made it serve the ends of His glory by conquering evil thru the cross of Jesus Christ and the redemption of sinners

This causes Paul to marvel at the wisdom of His ways – to save both Jew and Gentile

God's ways are higher than our ways

Isaiah 55:8 -9 - For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'

God's judgments are unsearchable / unfathomable

God is His own Counselor

We do not give God advice / He does not consult with us – before He allows a trial or a blessing to cross our path

God is bigger than the trials or tribulations we endure in this world

James Boice shares about Elisabeth Elliot's story

When she started out – she was a single woman in Ecuador seeking to do bible translation work in the Colorado language – she needed a helper who knew the language well – and could help her learn it. A man named Macario was provided – he was fluent in both Spanish and Colorado. However – shortly after they had begun work – he was murdered. A seemingly pointless setback to her life and purpose there

She went on with her work and at the end of a year had accomplished quite a bit. She had thousands of vocabulary cards done in the Colorado language – she had even made progress on an alphabet – but one day while she was away – all her materials were stolen. She and a couple other ladies prayed about it – but they were never recovered. The work was gone.

The next stage of her story is a little more familiar – she met Jim Elliott and married him. After 27 months of marriage Jim along with 4 other men was murdered by the Auca Indians – a tribe they were seeking to reach with the gospel. After some years – Elisabeth married Addison Leitch – a former President of Pittsburgh Theological seminary. Not long after – he died from cancer.

Elisabeth Elliot: 'The experiences of my life are not such that I could infer from them that God is good, gracious and merciful necessarily. To have one husband murdered and another one disintegrate body, soul and spirit, thru

cancer, is not what you would call a proof of the love of God. In fact, there are many times when it looks just the opposite. But my belief in the love of God is not by inference or instinct. It is by faith. To apprehend God's sovereignty working in that love is - we must say it - the last and highest victory of the faith that overcomes the world.'

I John 5:4 - 'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.'

We note: sometimes God's ways seem incomprehensible to us - but faith responds to His Word - 'God knows what He is doing'

Faith perseveres with God / and faith grows thru adversity

God does not operate according to our logic - His ways are higher

As we trust God - we find Him working all things together for our good and His glory - sometimes for a good which we may not recognize in this life - but will in eternity

Worship is the response of faith that says - 'it is well with my soul'

Romans 11:35 - 'Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?'

In our pride and vanity - we may be inclined to think that we are doing God a favor by serving Him or obeying Him

Reuben Torrey was once getting ready to speak to a crowd in Melbourne, Australia - when a note was passed forward to him

The note read: 'Dear Dr. Torrey . . . I have been praying for a long time for something that I am confident is according to God's will, but I do not get it. I have been a member of the Presbyterian Church for thirty years, and I have tried to be a consistent one all the time. I have been Superintendent in the Sunday School for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years; and yet God does not answer my prayer and I cannot understand it. Can you explain it to me?'

Torrey immediately saw something that was a problem with the man's question - and decided to use the note to make a point to the crowd that was gathering.

He went to the podium and read the note and said the problem was not difficult to see. "This man thinks that because he has been a consistent church member for thirty years, a faithful Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years, that God is under obligation to answer his prayer. He is really praying in his own name.'

Torrey added: 'We must give up any thought that we have any claims upon God . . . but Jesus Christ has great claims on God, and we should go to God in our prayers not on the ground of any goodness in ourselves, but on the ground of Jesus Christ's claims.'

After the meeting – the man who wrote the note approached him and said, 'you have hit the nail on the head.'

Romans 11:35-36 - 'Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.'

God does not owe us anything – it's all grace

He freely gives us the riches of salvation in Christ Jesus

God is the ultimate source of all that exists – of all that we see – this is our Father's world

From Him and to Him and through Him are all things

He is the Creator – we look at our world – 'Where did this come from?'

Acts 17:24 - "The God who made the world and all things in it . . ."

R. C. Sproul: 'Apart from God I cannot exist. Apart from me, God does exist. God does not need me in order for Him to be; I do need God in order for me to be. This is the difference between what we call self-existent being and dependent being. We are dependent. We are fragile. We cannot live without air, without water, without food. No human being has the power of being within himself. Life is lived between two hospitals. We need a support system from birth to death to sustain life. We are like flowers that bloom and then wither and then fade. This is how we differ from God. God does not wither, God does not fade, God is not fragile.'

The Word of God calls forth our praise

True worship is a response of the believing heart to the revealed truths of God

Conclusion

Actress - Patricia Heaton – perhaps most well-known for her role as Deborah on *Everybody Loves Raymond* - - - said that she recently read thru the entire Bible for the first time in her life

Before she had bounced around and took this passage and that - - - but this time she purposed to read thru the whole thing

One event struck her in its portrayal of humanity and our weakness – in fact it reminded her of the show – ‘Everybody Loves Raymond.’

In John 21 – Jesus tells Peter that he is being restored unto leadership – and that he will ultimately die a martyr’s death

How does Peter respond?

Peter looks over at John and says, ‘What about him? / what’s in store for John?’

Is he going to be martyred too?

Jesus said: ‘Don’t worry about it’ – that’s not your business

It reminded her of the sibling rivalry of Raymond and Robert

And John got the last word – because he included that little episode in his gospel!

The Bible is an amazing book

D.L. Moody: ‘this book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of life, the doom of sinners, the happiness of believers. Read it to be wise. Believe it to be safe. Practice it to be holy. It gives light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler’s map, the soldier’s sword, the Christian’s chart. Here paradise is restored: heaven is opened and the gates of Hell described. Christ is its theme, our good its design and the glory of God its end.’

The overarching message:

There is mercy enough for any and every sinner who will turn in faith to Jesus the Savior – both to the Jew and the Gentile