

IN OVER OUR HEADS

"DOXOLOGY"

ROMANS 11:33-36

Romans 9-11 is about the people of Israel. In these chapters Paul discusses their past unbelief (9:1-3; 10:1), their present *partial* and *temporary* hardening (10:21; 11:7-10), and their future salvation (11:25-27). As a Gentile Christian, you might wonder what these chapters have to do with you. Why bother with them? I once had a businessman in a Sunday morning Bible study I taught ask occasionally, "How much of this do I really need to know?" I believe he was under the impression that passages with direct, personal, practical application to people as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, or business owners and employees are the only ones worth knowing. While it's undoubtedly true that all scripture "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2Ti 3:16-17), scripture is more than useful curriculum.

Scripture can do more than *inform*; among other things, it can *evoke* various responses, worship being one of them. For example, the Psalms can *express* praise and can *evoke* praise—at times both. The familiar refrain, "Hallelujah" or "Praise the Lord," can both express praise and evoke praise. In the opening verse of Psalm 146 it appears to do both. It expresses the psalmist's praise and it calls others to praise. "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!" Then in verses 6-8, the psalmist lists

God is the source, the means, and the goal of all things, all historical purposes, and all salvific events.

— Ben Witherington III

reasons to praise God. He is a faithful Creator, a compassionate advocate, a powerful deliverer, a friend of the righteous, and a protector of the vulnerable.

Romans 11 ends with a doxology, about which one writer explains: "The doxology of verses 33-36 rounds off not merely chapters i-xi; it concludes the whole argument of chapters i-xi" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 213). Romans 1-11 does more than inform; it evokes praise. All have sinned, but God declares "not guilty" those who are not innocent and yet remains righteous himself. He is able to do this through the offering of Christ as an atoning sacrifice for sinners, so righteousness might come to all by faith and not by works. Jesus came to his own people, but ethnic Israel rejected him, although a remnant believed. However, their transgression neither frustrated God's plan nor annulled the promise he made to Abraham. God used Israel's transgression—read "unbelief"—to bring salvation to the Gentiles. And once their full number comes to faith, he will return to his people, and "all Israel will be saved."

So how much of Romans 1-11 do you need to know? All of it! Not because every verse has a "direct, personal, practical application" to you, but because knowing it *evokes* God's praise.

This Week's Core Competency

Personal God – I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Romans 11:33-36 contains a doxology. Dictionary definitions are all much the same, "a liturgical formula of praise to God." Descriptive definitions like the following one are more helpful:

cont. pg. 2

"The dictionary defines *doxology* as 'an expression of praise to God, especially a short hymn sung as part of a Christian worship service.' The word doxology comes from the Greek *doxa* ('glory, splendor, grandeur'), and *logos*, ('word' or 'speaking'). Most doxologies are short hymns of praise to God in various Christian worship services, often added to the end of canticles, psalms, and hymns.

The *Gloria Patri*, so named for its first two words in Latin, is commonly used as a doxology by Roman Catholics, Old Catholics, Independent Catholics, Orthodox and many Protestants including Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Reformed Baptists. It is called the 'Lesser Doxology,' thus distinguished from the 'Great Doxology,' *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, and is often called simply 'the Doxology.' The Latin text of the Lesser Doxology is "*Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.*" Literally translated, it means "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." As well as praising God, this doxology is also a short declaration of faith in the co-equality of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

Another commonly heard doxology is 'Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,' which was written in 1674 by Thomas Ken, a priest in the Church of England. The familiar words are 'Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.'

Although the word doxology is not found in the Bible, the themes expressed in doxologies are certainly scriptural. Praising God for His blessings (Eph 1:3), ascribing to Him all glory (Rom 11:36; Eph 3:21), and affirming the Trinity (Mt 28:19) have always been integral parts of true Christian worship" (www.gotquestions.org/doxology.html).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

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.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "O" and "How" in v. 33.
- * Bracket "riches," "wisdom," and "knowledge" in v. 33.
- * Underline "unsearchable" and "inscrutable" in v. 33.
- * Box the exclamation points in v. 33.
- * Double underline "judgments" and "paths" in v. 33.
- * Box the question marks in vv. 34, 35.
- * Highlight "from," "through," and "to" in v. 36.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. "O" and "how" introduce *exclamations* in verse 33. Define "exclamation" in your own words.
2. The "knowledge of God"—our knowledge of God, his knowledge of us, or his omniscience. Which is it?
3. What is the *implied* answer to the three *rhetorical* questions in verses 34 and 35?
4. Explain how the meaning of the *rhetorical* questions in verse 34 relates to the *exclamations* in verse 33.
5. Explain the point of the *rhetorical* question in verse 35.
6. Put what "*from* him . . . are all things" means in your own words.
7. Put what "*through* him . . . are all things" means in your own words.
8. Put what "*for* him . . . are all things" means in your own words.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the effect this doxology has on you. Explain how it *informs* and *evokes*.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In the introduction to his comments on Romans 11:33-36, one commentator writes: "Paul appropriately concludes one of his most profound, and difficult theological discussions with a hymn in praise of God for his purposes and plans . . . Throughout Rom. 9-11, while certain points remain hard to understand, Paul is claiming to be transmitting truth to which his readers are to respond. And Paul certainly teaches elsewhere that in Christ, and through the Spirit, we have access to 'the secret and hidden wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 2:6-16). We should, then, perhaps understand Paul's praise to be motivated not so much by the hiddenness of God's ways but by the (admittedly partial) revelation of those mind-transcending ways to us" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 740). He then goes on to outline the structure of the passage. "This expression of praise falls into three strophes: v. 33, containing three exclamations about God's wise plan; vv. 34-35, featuring three rhetorical questions that emphasize human inability to understand God's ways; and v. 36, containing a declaration about the ultimacy of God that calls forth a final doxology" (740).

Verse 33 contains an exclamation, namely, a sudden emotion filled cry of praise to God for his omniscience, more specifically, for his unfathomable ingenuity regarding the design and execution of his plan to make salvation by grace through faith available to Jews and Gentiles alike. "Whatever wisdom and knowledge the believer might claim (cf. 1 Cor 3:18; 8:1; 12:8) he has not even begun to know what God knows or to see what God sees" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38b, *Romans 9-16*, 703). The Lord himself says in the Old Testament:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,' declares the
LORD.
'As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts"
(Isa 55:8-9).

Verses 34 and 35 contain three rhetorical questions, the implied answer to each being "no one." Putting the questions in the form of declarative statements, the verses read: "No one has known the mind of the Lord. No one has been his counselor. No one has ever given to God that God should repay him." Paul agreed with Isaiah (40:13-14). No one can fully know God's mind. What's more, he is so wise he has no need for counselors. And Job's observation that God has never needed to depend on human assistance—which would put him in man's debt (Job 35:7; 41:11)—is also true. "The very idea of man being able to offer advice to God, let alone to understand enough of God's judgments and ways to be able to evaluate them as more appropriate or less appropriate, is not even worth considering" (703).

Verse 36 contains Paul's final doxology, in which he affirms the centrality of God in all of creation. He is the source of all things, the sustainer of all things, and the goal of all things, the beginning, middle and end of everything. "In an argument which began with man's rebellion against God as creator (1:18-25), what could be more appropriate than a final acclamation of God the creator? In the final analysis the election of Israel, the gospel outreach to the Gentiles, the whole course of salvation-history itself, are simply aspects of the most fundamental relation of all, that of the Creator with his creation. To him alone be the glory forever. Amen" (704).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

*Glory to God—from whom, through whom, and for whom are all things—
for the riches of his wisdom and knowledge expressed in his unique
plan to provide salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike by grace
through faith and not by the works of the law.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Sing the doxology or praise song of your choosing.

Read Romans 11:33-36 and go for a quiet walk.

Discuss the genius of God's plan of salvation with another believer.

notes **STUDY** – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 33 **O, How** The first and third lines in Paul's hymn begin with exclamatory particles introducing emotional exclamations of awe.

v. 33 **riches** Cf., v. 12. Rather than the resources God has at his disposal, the term "riches" more like refers to his kindness expressed in the blessings of salvation that he bestows on undeserving Jews and Gentiles alike.

v. 33 **wisdom, knowledge** "It is possible to make 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' dependent upon 'wealth': '... the depth of God's wealth both of wisdom and of knowledge'; but it seems better to treat all these words as independent" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC, 228). The term [*sophia*] occurs only here in Romans in contrast to 17x in 1 Corinthians and 6x in Colossians. Here it "clearly denotes the wisdom of God in the way he operates in reference to the world, or specifically in the way he brings about man's salvation (1 Cor 1:21; Eph 3:10; *Herm. Vis.* 1.3.4). The thought is still of the mystery of God's saving purpose for all" (Dunn, 699). "Knowledge refers to God's all-inclusive and exhaustive cognition and understanding, wisdom to the arrangement and adaptation of all things to the fulfilment of his holy designs" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 106). "God's 'wisdom' is His ability to arrange His plan so it results in good for both Jews and Gentiles and His own glory. His 'knowledge' testifies to His ability to construct such a plan-His divine ingenuity" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 171, planobiblechapel.org/constable-notes).

v. 33 **judgments, paths** The two words occurring in parallel lines are synonyms. "Paul applies this description [unsearchable] to God's judgments, which will not refer here, as the word usually does in Paul, to God's judicial decisions, but to his 'executive' decisions about the direction of salvation history. The word 'ways' in the last line has essentially the same meaning; they, too, Paul exclaims, are 'inscrutable'" (Moo, 742). "His decisions ('judgments') spring from logic that extends beyond human ability to comprehend. His procedures ('ways') are so complex that humans cannot discover them without the aid of divine revelation (cf. Isa. 55:8-9)" (Constable, 171).

v. 34 ??? "The second strophe in Paul's hymn comprises three questions, the first two of which come from Isa 40:13 and the third (in v. 35) from (perhaps) Job 41:3. It is possible that each question relates, in reverse order, to one of the exclamations in v. 33. 'Who knows the mind of the Lord?' would then expand the inscrutable ways of God, 'Who has been his counselor?' would draw out the implication of his unsearchable judgments, and 'Who has given to him in advance, so as to give back to him?' would suggest an implication of God's riches (= his kindness and mercy)" (Moo, 742-43).

v. 35 **repay** God's riches are graciously given. "God acts in grace, and it is therefore impossible to build up a store of merit with him by reason of which one may claim a reward; whatever he gives he gives freely. With God, man never earns a recompense; he can only be loved and treated with mercy" (Barrett, 228-29).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

I remember my reaction when I discovered I was pregnant with my first child. I dropped to my knees with a loud "Oh!" and began praising God for His goodness. I always wanted to be a mom and was overwhelmed with God's sweet gift. Four children later my "Oh" sometimes becomes "Oh dear!" As a parent my worship of God changes to wondering just exactly what He is doing, especially when my kids challenge me, and boy can they challenge me. At this point in the summer my family always seems to be a little on edge. We're tired of each other, tired of the heat, tired of the lack of routine, even tired of the fun activities. School seems an appealing alternative to the summer crazy. Are you eager for school to begin and settle into a normal routine? This passage is a great reminder for me to take my eyes off my circumstances and redirect my focus to worshipping God for the blessing of these four amazing kids. Make it a point this week to pause and redirect your focus from weary to worship. Thank God for the blessing of your children and the opportunity to spend time with them. Involve your children in family worship as you sing praise music while you're doing chores or driving in the car. Color a picture or take a family walk around the neighborhood noticing God's beautiful creation. Enjoy worshipping as a family this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ro 11:33-36

1. What do we learn about God in this passage?
2. How would you answer the questions asked in verses 34-3?
3. What does it mean to give God glory?

What Do You Think

At this point in Romans Paul turns his focus from talking about God to worshipping Him. What do you think it means to worship God?

What R U Going To Do

Who do you say God is? Make a list of all the things you know about God and put it where you can see it as a daily reminder of His goodness.

Core Comp

Personal God - I believe God cares about everything in my life.

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 2:10 - *These are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.