

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY & MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY – Chapters 9-11

LESSON 41 – THE THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP – Romans 11:33-36

In this lesson, we will discover the true response to knowing the purposes and plans of God. In a manner of speaking, we find Paul saying, “Wow!” when he considers who God is and what He has done.

Writer Michael Horton wrote this about the weakness of the church’s understanding of God, “The older theology tended to provide character... By the end of the twentieth century, we have become God’s demanding little brats. In church, we must be entertained. Our emotions must be charged... We must be offered amusing programs. We gave up a lot to become Christians and what little teaching we do get must cater to our pragmatic, self-centered interests. The preaching must be filled with clever anecdotes and colorful illustrations, with nothing more than passing references to doctrine: ‘I want to know what this means for me and my daily experience!’ We have forgotten that God is a Monarch. He is the King by whom and for whom all things were made, and by whose sovereign power they are sustained. We exist for his pleasure, not he for ours; we are on this earth to entertain him, to please him, to adore him, to bring him satisfaction, excitement and joy. Any gospel that seeks to answer the question, ‘What’s in it for me?’ has it all backwards. The question is, ‘What’s in it for God?’”

This problem in the churches of our day is addressed by these final verses of Romans 11. Many modern day churches have lost their focus. Instead of focusing on God, the church is focusing on mankind. Thankfully, Paul did not resort to preaching things that would make Christians feel good about themselves. Instead, he keeps the focus right where it should be...on the God who made it possible for us to be saved.

For eleven chapters he has been explaining God’s plan of redemption, building a theological argument that all are lost and can be saved thanks to the mercy and grace of God. Chapters 1-3 show that the whole world is guilty before God because of sin. Chapters 3-5 presented justification by faith as God’s answer to our sin. In chapters 6-8 we learned about life in the Spirit and in chapters 9-11 we found God’s plan for the salvation of everyone...both the Jews and the Gentiles.

By the time Paul gets to the end of chapter 11, he seems to be overwhelmed by the greatness of God and he shares that in praise to God. Paul stops before moving on to his next subject to reflect on God.

Worship Is Wondering About God

Worship is getting caught up in the things that we know about God. We can’t know or understand God completely. If we could, He wouldn’t be God.

“The highest science, and the and loftiest speculation, and the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of the child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. The greatest pursuit of the human mind is to attain to a knowledge of God.”

– Charles Spurgeon

Wondering About God's Wealth – Depth refers to the fullness and mystery of God...the fact that you cannot reach the limits of Him. With God, you never reach the limit of His riches, wisdom or knowledge. God is not understandable in terms of knowing Him. If He has not revealed Himself to us by His own choice, we would not have any way to know Him at all. In his writings, Paul constantly made reference to the wealth of God. God's riches are beyond anything with which we have to compare.

Wondering About God's Wisdom – The wisdom of God isn't what God knows...that refers to knowledge. The wisdom of God is His ability to choose the proper means to achieve His purposes. Many people are filled with knowledge but that is not the same as being filled with wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to take knowledge and turn it into actions that accomplish good things. This is certainly what God is able to do.

Wondering About God's Knowledge – The knowledge of God is His omniscience. Omniscience means that God knows everything past, present and future. He doesn't think of things in order from one to the next like we do. He knows everything all the time. This kind of knowledge doesn't exist in human beings...it is beyond our understanding. We are sometimes surprised by something we learn about ourselves, but God never is. He knows everything about us that has been or ever will be.

So worship is, first of all, wondering about God...meditating on His character and the depths of who He is. Wondering about God is a lifelong process...actually and eternal one. We will spend all of eternity wondering about the depths of the God who created us and redeemed us. By worshipping God, we come to know Him better.

Worship Is Waiting For God

We've seen that worship is wondering about God, and now we learn that worship is waiting on God. There is a sense in which we have to wait on God for Him to reveal Himself to us so we can learn more about Him. We learn things by taking a new piece of knowledge and comparing it to something we already know. With God...since He is beyond our understanding...we have nothing to compare Him to. As we grow in our experience and knowledge of God, we develop more and more common ground with Him and that lets us learn even more. Knowing God is a process, and waiting on Him in worship is how we get to know Him better.

The Knowledge of God is Unsearchable – Isaiah 55:8-9 is a great passage on the unsearchable nature of God's character and attributes.

“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.”

“Trying to understand God is akin to a shellfish trying to tell other shellfish what a man, a human being is like. The shellfish uses the only words he knows to describe the human, but ultimately gets it mostly wrong because he has no common language or set of experiences which overlap with the human. That is a little like man trying to know God. We mostly think of Him in our terms, only bigger, better, smarter, wiser and so on. But in reality, God is not a man any more than a shellfish is a man. So our ability to describe God is severely limited. The fact that God condescended to come to earth as a man at least gives us the common ground of humanity to bridge the gap. But the Second Person of the Trinity is not by nature a human being.”

– C.S. Lewis

The Wisdom of God is Untraceable – Next, Paul asks, “Who has been His counselor?” He says the ways of God are “beyond tracing out.” It’s like being in the middle of a forest and discovering God’s tracks go everywhere...in all directions. There is no way to follow them all because they are too many and go in too many directions. It is His infinite, untraceable ways that set Him apart from us.

The Wealth of God is Unfathomable – To put God’s wealth in perspective...all the wealth of the entire world has come from Him and it is like dust to Him according to Isaiah 40. Not only is God wealthy, He is totally self-sufficient. He owes no one and needs nothing. Because God created all things, everything is His to use for the fulfilling of His purposes. If we could ever come to grips with the depth of God’s wealth, we would never worry about the future again.

True worship is simply understanding...as best we can...the greatness of God and acknowledging that back to Him in the form of praise. When we realize the part we play in the great scheme of things, we come a lot closer to true worship. Our part is to simply receive from God’s abundant provision of mercy and grace; to trust in the wealth of His riches, in His wisdom and in His knowledge.

Verses 33-36 are Paul’s words of praise to God but every one of us should praise Him as well. Romans 9-11 should give us a passion for worshipping Him as He takes us toward our eternal, heavenly home.