

## **Romans (70) Glory to God**

If we were to outline the book of Romans as some have done in the past, then with the completion of our consideration of Romans 1 through 11, we have arrived at the end of the first of two major divisions of Paul's epistle. These first eleven chapters of Romans have been exclusively *doctrinal* in content; that is, the apostle has set forth teaching respecting the sum and substance of the Christian faith—*what it is we are to believe*. Beginning with Romans 12:1, which we will pick up next Lord's Day, Lord willing, we will begin the second portion of the epistle which is largely *practical* application—*how it is that we are to live*. Paul would commonly order his letters by presenting these two separate divisions of the epistle, doctrinal instruction and practical instruction. He first set forth his doctrine, teaching regarding the content of the faith, and then he would set forth the practical application of that doctrine.

The order of these two sections is very important, first doctrinal and then followed by the practical. Biblical Christian living grows from and out of Christian doctrine. Sometimes well meaning Christians fall into the error of looking to the Word of God only for practical instruction. This is often the desire that Christian people have; they want to know practically how they are to live day-by-day. Many in pulpits of evangelical churches, knowing that this is the desire of most people, govern the content of their sermons to be predominantly, and sometimes exclusively, practical instruction on how to live. They open their Bibles. They have their people open their Bibles. They show from the Bible the practical steps of how to live. And so, because they know that the people will not endure sound doctrine, for it is tedious to them, they will tell the people how they are to live. People like this. Everyone listens. They all leave church believing they have heard from God's Word, and that they are all now striving to live "biblically." But what has been left out is Jesus Christ as the center and the source for all true Christian living. And when you are absent Christ, you lose what it really means to be Christian.

Paul had warned Timothy of the tendency of church folks to desire these things and thereby depart from sound doctrine. We read in 2 Timothy 4:1ff:

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup>Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching (doctrine). <sup>3</sup>For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; <sup>4</sup>and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. <sup>5</sup>But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

People will tend to have little interest to hear biblical doctrine, because they perhaps view it as boring or irrelevant to life. God must awaken the soul to the desire to know Him in truth. He must give the delight of the heart in hearing of Him and His ways. But those who are void of this work of grace, will go directly and sometimes only to those passages that give practical instruction. But in doing so they cease to be essentially Christian, but rather they become merely moralistic in their teaching. They are easily drawn off the exclusive and central focus on the person of Jesus Christ. The way to avoid the error of moralism is to see the instruction for Christian living connected vitally with, even flowing from, Christian doctrine. Beginning next week we will begin to see some very practical instruction on how to live, but it is based upon and flows out of what has been set before us in Romans 1 through 11.

Now Paul, having come to the end of his exposition of the great doctrines of the Christian faith, concludes with an expression of great praise to God for who He is, for all that He has done, and for all that He will yet do in history. Paul's declaration of the greatness of God is an exuberant expression of praise, reflecting his own amazement upon his contemplation of the wisdom and majesty of God, that He would so order history in the manner that He has decreed from eternity. We read in verses 33 through 36:

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? <sup>35</sup>Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? <sup>36</sup>For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36)

Here Paul expressed himself with great emotion. He was taken up with an overwhelming sense of wonder that God could devise the course of history as He had done. Paul was astounded that God was so great that He could bring His plans to pass. He confessed and celebrated God's wisdom and sovereignty. He attempted to lift his readers to the same degree of adoration that he felt and expressed. Let us consider his words.

First the apostle expressed wonder at the infinite riches, and wisdom and knowledge of God. **Verse 33** reads, "***Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!***" I suspect that this last exposition of God's purpose to redeem His people by partially hardening the Jews so as to have mercy on the Gentiles and thereby causing some Jews to become "jealous" by their blessing thereby bringing some Jews to salvation, that brought to Paul's mind an overwhelming wonder at God's unfolding plan in history on such a scale. The result is Paul's expression of praise of God. "***Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!***"

It might appear at first glance that Paul was expressing his initial praise of two of God's attributes, His wisdom and knowledge.<sup>1</sup> In other words, we probably read the verse as though it said this, "Oh, the depth of the riches *of the* wisdom and knowledge of God!" But that is not what he said. If you look carefully (in the ESV), he wrote, "Oh, the depth *of the* riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" And so, Paul actually expresses his initial praise of "three" attributes of God. Again, **verse 33** reads, "***Oh, the depth of (1) the riches and (2) wisdom and (3) knowledge of God!***"<sup>2</sup>

**The first point of wonder** of Paul regarding God's nature is expressed through the word, "riches." "***Oh, the depth of the riches... of God!***"<sup>3</sup> What did Paul mean by the "riches" of God when contemplating the nature of God's dealings in history? It is difficult to say with certainty, but I believe it is probably most likely to see how Paul used the word "riches" to describe God nature elsewhere. In his epistle to the church at Ephesus he used the word "rich" or "riches" to describe several attributes of God. In Ephesians 2, after Paul had described our spiritually dead condition in our sins, totally unable to raise ourselves from our spiritually dead condition, he spoke about the riches of God.

<sup>4</sup>But God, being ***rich in mercy***, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show ***the immeasurable riches of his grace*** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-7)

And so Paul references the riches of God's mercy and the riches of God's grace. We also read of the riches of God's grace in Ephesians 1:7, "In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." And so, I would suggest that in Paul's expression, "Oh, the

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, this is how the KJV, the NKJV, and the NASV translate this verse, to emphasize only two attributes, God's wisdom and knowledge. The NKJV reads, "Oh, the depth of the riches ***both*** of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

<sup>2</sup> "Riches" is not an adjective describing God's "wisdom" and "knowledge." Rather, "riches" is a genitive noun, just as are "wisdom" and "knowledge." The subject or nominative noun is "depth" followed by these three genitives joined with the conjunction "and." In other words, Paul was exclaiming wonder regarding the (1) depth of God's "riches", (2) the depth of God's wisdom", and (3) the depths of God's "knowledge." This is how the ESV and the NIV translate the verse. According to Schreiner, the majority of biblical scholars have this understanding. Schreiner disagrees however, as does John Murray, in that he sees the "depth of the riches" to apply to the two attributes of wisdom and knowledge. They see the first Greek conjunction in the series to be translated as "both" as in the KJV and the NJKV. I disagree with these good men on this point. See Thomas Schreiner, ***Romans*** (Baker Academic, 1998), pp. 632f; and John Murray, ***The Epistle to the Romans*** (Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 105f.

<sup>3</sup> Actually, the one word "riches" may depict both God's great "mercy" as well as His great "grace" toward sinners, as we will show from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

depth of the riches... of God!", Paul was alluding to the riches of God's grace, and he probably had the thought of God's mercy also in this concept of God's "riches." Paul was keenly aware of the terrible guilt and utter hopelessness and helplessness of everyone everywhere to escape the just condemnation of God upon them. And so, when he contemplated the plan and purpose of God in history, that God might be just and yet to "have mercy on all" (Rom. 11:32), he was overwhelmed with praise for "the depths of God's riches" (of mercy and grace).

*The second point of wonder* of Paul regarding God's nature is expressed through the word, "wisdom." "**Oh, the depth of the wisdom... of God!**"<sup>4</sup> Our God is infinitely wise. Consider these verses that state the factualness of this assertion of **the wisdom of God**:

**Job 12:12.** "Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days. <sup>13</sup>**With God is wisdom** and might; He has counsel and understanding."

**Daniel 2:20f.** "Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed is the name of God forever and ever, **for wisdom and might are His.**' <sup>21</sup>And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; **He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.**"

**Romans 16:27.** "**To God, alone wise,** be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen."

**1 Timothy 1:17.** "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God **who alone is wise,** be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

**Jude 1:25.** "To God our Savior, **Who alone is wise,** be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."

God's wisdom is described in God's Word as unfathomable; that is, incapable of being understood fully. This is what is suggested in Paul's doxology: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"

God reveals Himself as all-wise through **His actions in history**. Psalm 104:24 reads, "O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all." How is the wisdom of God displayed through His actions? **First**, the wisdom of God is known in **His work of creation**. Only an all-wise God could have produced the world in which we live. There is an order, and interdependence, an interrelation between all things that shows an infinitely wise God is ordering the existence of all things. The existence of all things betrays an all-wise designer. Consider the testimony of **Albert Einstein**, who was no Christian, nevertheless understood and concluded that the universe betrays a Designer who is still controlling the universe. He said,

We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many different languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent being toward God. We see a universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws, but only dimly understand those laws. Our limited minds cannot grasp the mysterious force that moves the constellations.<sup>5</sup>

This statement was not a faith statement; it was a conclusion that Einstein made from his own observation and assessment of the universe. Now one could logically argue whether his conclusion was correct in the light of the evidence that he observed, but one cannot dismiss his statement as a statement merely dictated by faith generated from his religion. It was his reasonable conclusion from the scientific observation of the universe. There is a complexity and an order, and an orderly functioning of all that exists that betrays an all-wise God who created all things.

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<sup>4</sup> Actually, the one word "riches" may depict both God's great "mercy" as well as His great "grace" toward sinners, as we will show from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

<sup>5</sup> John F. Ashton, ed., *In Six Days; Why Fifty Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation*, Master Books, 2001, p.156.

Consider the words of **Thomas Watson**, the 18<sup>th</sup> century puritan pastor on the wisdom of God displayed in the creation.

None but an all wise God could so curiously contrive the world. Behold the earth decked with variety of flowers, which are both for beauty and fragrance. Behold the heaven bespangled with lights. We may see the glorious wisdom of God blazing in the sun, twinkling in the stars. His wisdom is seen in marshalling and ordering everything in its proper place and sphere. If the sun had been set lower, it would have burnt us; if higher, it would not have warmed us with its beams. God's wisdom is seen in appointing the seasons of the year. "Thou hast made summer and winter" (Psa. 74:17). If it had been all summer, the heat would have scorched us; if all winter, the cold would have killed us. The wisdom of God is seen in chequering the dark and the light. If it had been all night, there had been no labour; if all day, there had been no rest. Wisdom is seen in mixing the elements, as the earth with the sea. If it had been all sea, we had wanted bread; if it had been all earth, we had wanted water. The wisdom of God is seen in preparing and ripening the fruits of the earth, in the wind and frost that prepare the fruits, and in the sun and rain that ripen the fruits. God's wisdom is seen in setting bounds to the sea, and so wisely contriving it, that though the sea be higher than many parts of the earth, yet it should not overflow the earth; so that we may cry out with the Psalmist, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all" (Psa. 104: 24).<sup>6</sup>

***A second work of God*** in which His unsearchable wisdom is displayed in ***His work of bringing redemption to His people***. **Thomas Watson** wrote:

Here was the masterpiece of divine wisdom, to contrive a way to happiness between the sin of man and the justice of God. We may cry out with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:33). This astonished men and angels. If God had put us to find out a way of salvation when we were lost, we could neither have had a head to devise, nor a heart to desire, what God's infinite wisdom had found out for us. Mercy had a mind to save sinners, and was loath that the justice of God should be wronged. It is a pity, says Mercy, that such a noble creature as man should be made to be undone; and yet God's justice must not be a loser. What way then shall be found out? Angels cannot satisfy for the wrong done to God's justice, nor is it fit that one nature should sin, and another nature suffer. What then? Shall man be forever lost? Now, while Mercy was thus debating with itself, what to do for the recovery of fallen man, the Wisdom of God stepped in; and thus the oracle spake: - Let God become man; let the Second Person in the Trinity be incarnate, and suffer; and so for fitness He shall be man, and for ability he shall be God; thus justice may be satisfied, and man saved. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God, thus to make justice and mercy to kiss each other! Great is this mystery, 'God manifest in the flesh' (1 Tim. 3:16). What wisdom was this, that Christ should be made sin, yet know no sin; that God should condemn the sin, yet save the sinner! Here was wisdom, to find out the way of salvation.

God's work of salvation reveals His unsearchable wisdom in the way that He chose people to be saved from their sins through ***faith***. Faith as a way of salvation leaves the saved sinner humble and shows forth the Savior as glorious. Faith enables all glory to be given to Jesus Christ and none to be assumed by the Christian.

The manner in which God produces faith in us betrays God's wisdom. Faith is produced by "hearing" and that hearing is of the "Word of God preached." This is foolishness in the mind of the world, but it is incredible wisdom on the part of God. He saves us in a manner that "no flesh may glory in His presence" ((1 Cor. 1:29). Paul wrote of the spiritual life that was in him, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Here God's wisdom is seen, in that no flesh may glory in his Presence in His application of salvation to His people.

***Third, the wisdom of God is displayed through God's works of providence in history.*** God not only created the world, God governs His world. And God's governance reveals His wisdom. Paul described God's dealings with Israel and the Gentiles that was so clever as to bring about God's purposes in a way that a man could never have devised, Paul exclaimed:

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Banner of Truth, 1992), p. 72.r

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out! <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? <sup>35</sup>Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? <sup>36</sup>For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:33ff)

More specifically, how is God's wisdom seen in His work of providence, or His governance of all things that transpire in His world?

(1) ***God's wisdom is displayed in His bringing to pass great events by using what appears to be insignificant or inadequate means.*** In Numbers 21 we read of an incident when Israel murmured against God and Moses, complaining about God's dealings with them. We may read there:

<sup>5</sup>And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." <sup>6</sup>So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numb. 21:5-9)

We see how God healed the people who had been bitten by poisonous snakes, using a bronze snake on a pole. This means had no direct contact with any of the persons bitten. It did not require them to do anything, promise anything, achieve anything. They were told that all they were to do was to look, believing in God's provision, and they would be saved from death and would be healed. Here the wisdom of God is seen in that it was a means that brought no glory to anyone but God. Those who were dying did nothing meritorious or effectual to bring about their cure. They were to look in faith, and in faith they were healed. God in His wisdom brought about their deliverance so that He alone would be looked to and credited with their deliverance.

But of course we also see the wisdom of God in this rather simple solution to their grievous condition, in that God through it displayed the glorious salvation that comes through His Son Jesus Christ, through whose crucifixion would bring about the forgiveness of sins. And so John's Gospel could record,

<sup>13</sup>"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven. <sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:13-16)

And so, in this simple means, the glorious end or outcome reveals the wisdom of God.

Similarly, we could look at the manner in which God brought the healing of **Naaman the Syrian** of his leprosy. We read of this in 2 Kings 5.

<sup>1</sup>Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. <sup>2</sup>And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup>Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." <sup>4</sup>And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel."

<sup>5</sup>Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. <sup>6</sup>Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said,

Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

<sup>7</sup>And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me.”

<sup>8</sup>So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

<sup>9</sup>Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha’s house. <sup>10</sup>And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.” <sup>11</sup>But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, “Indeed, I said to myself, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’ <sup>12</sup>Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage. <sup>13</sup>And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” <sup>14</sup>So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. (2 Kings 5:1-14)

Now consider the wisdom of God in using this seeming simple means of washing in the Jordan to bring about Naaman’s cure. First, we see the wisdom of God in His providence of having a young Jewish girl as a slave in Naaman’s household. We do not know how or why she was there, but clearly God had placed her there in His providence. And then we see how the subject arose in the conversation of the slave girl and Naaman’s wife. No doubt the Lord moved the young Jewish girl to have first learned, then later remembered the ability of Elisha to work miracles. The wife of Naaman believed the girl. Naaman believed his wife. And then we have the seeming absurd way of cleansing, which was washing in the Jordan. The entire event resulted in this pagan foreign army officer to be converted and resolve before the true God the remaining days of his life.

God delights in bringing about His purposes through small and insignificant things and people. It was the youngest son of a family from an insignificant town, a shepherd boy, that God chose to lead His people Israel. God would choose His Son to be born into the world to a poor family living in an obscure corner of Galilee who would one day be the Lord and Savior of mankind.

God’s wisdom is seen in the intricacies of his providence in a multitude of ways through Scripture. The wisdom of God is evident.

Not only is *God’s wisdom is displayed in His brining to pass great events by using what appears to be insignificant or inadequate means,...*

(2) *The wisdom of God is seen in doing God doing His work through ironic circumstances.* How would God fulfill young Joseph’s vision of his parents and his brothers bowing down before him? God would send Joseph to Egypt, first as a slave, and then to become a prisoner, and then to become prime minister.

By his imprisonment God made way for his advancement. For God to save in an ordinary way would not so much display His wisdom. But when He goes strangely to work, and saves in that very way in which we think He will destroy, His wisdom shines forth in a most conspicuous manner.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Watson, p. 74.

When God purposed to deliver His people from their oppression from under the Midianites, He would use small means so that He would alone receive the glory. How God did it and that God could do it displays His wisdom. The call was made by Gideon, 32,000 men showed up. But that was too many. A cut was made, 22,000 who were fearful were sent away. But that was too many. Take them down to the river side, and select the ones that drank water in a certain manner. Only 300 remained. But with them God made a way to cause a panic among Israel's enemies and a great victory resulted.

When the time came for God to deliver His people from Egypt from under Pharaoh, how did God do His work. He did not cause His people to come into favor of the Egyptians; rather, we read that God turned the Egyptians "to hate His people" (Psa. 105:25). "The more they hated and oppressed Israel, the more God plagued the Egyptians, and the more glad they were to let Israel go (Exod. 12:33).

When God would save his runaway prophet and set him back on his mission, God first a great storm to arise at sea and then God caused a great fish to swallow Jonah and deliver him toward Nineveh, God's destination for him.

When God would have Paul sent to bear witness to Rome of the Gospel, God caused Paul to be arrested. He led him to appeal to Caesar, and therefore, to Caesar Paul was sent.

(3) ***The wisdom of God is seen in making the greatest of evils to turn about for the good of His people.*** Joseph's brothers meant their treatment of Joseph to be cruel as they were moved by evil. But God intended to turn that event out for the salvation of his family. And the devil, the Jewish leaders, and the Roman leaders, all complicit in crucifying Jesus, unwittingly, were the very instruments God used to bring about the salvation of all of God's people. As one once said, God "makes His people gainers by losses, and turns their crosses into blessings."

(4) ***The wisdom of God is seen in this, that the sins of men shall carry on God's work; yet He should have no hand in their sin.***

The Lord permits sin, but does not approve it. He has a hand in the action in which sin is, but not in the sin of the action. As in the crucifying of Christ, so far as it was a natural action, God concurred; if He had not given the Jews life and breath, they could not have done it; but as it was a sinful action, so God abhorred it. A musician plays upon a violin out of tune; the musician is the cause of the sound, but the jarring and discord is from the violin itself; so men's natural motion is from God, but their sinful motion is from themselves. When a man rides on a lame horse, his riding is the cause why the horse goes, but the lameness is from the horse itself. Herein is God's wisdom, that the sins of men carry on His work, yet he has no hand in them.<sup>8</sup>

(5) ***The wisdom of God is seen when God delivers people from helpless and hopeless conditions.*** When man's arm fails, when man's wits fail, when man exhausts every option, but then he humbles himself, God intervenes and brings deliverance. The wisdom of God is displayed how He works deliverances and victories.

(6) ***God's wisdom is seen in befooling wise men, and in making their wisdom the means of their overthrow.*** "God taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (Job 5:13); that is, when they think they are wise and will succeed by deceit and trickery, God uncovers them and exposes them for the corrupt men they are. God hung Haman on his own gallows he prepared to hang Mordecai.

***The third point of wonder*** of Paul regarding God's nature is expressed through the word, "knowledge." ***"Oh, the depth... of the knowledge of God!"***<sup>9</sup> Paul had already exclaimed wonder at the riches of "the wisdom" of God. What is meant by the "knowledge" of God? Some have suggested that the ideas reflected in "wisdom" and "knowledge" should not be pressed so as to be distinguished from one another.<sup>10</sup> But if they are

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<sup>8</sup> Watson, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Actually, the one word "riches" may depict both God's great "mercy" as well as His great "grace" toward sinners, as we will show from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

<sup>10</sup> This is Schreiner's view (See ***Romans***, p. 633)

to be distinguished, and I think they are to be so understood, then God's "knowledge" speaks of His omniscience, but also includes the fact that He decreed all things that come to pass, but God's "wisdom" describes God's plan or purpose in history.

Knowledge refers to God's all-inclusive and exhaustive cognition and understanding, wisdom to the arrangement and adaptation of all things to the fulfillment of His holy designs. In God these are correlative and it would be artificial to press the distinction unduly. His knowledge involves perfect understanding of interrelationships and these, in turn, are determined by His wisdom; the relations of things exist only by reason of the designs they are to promote in His all-comprising plan.<sup>11</sup>

God is *all-knowing*, in that we refer to Him as *omniscient*. His knowledge is infinite. He not only has before Him in current realization all that is occurring presently in the world, whether be the actions of men or nations, or the thoughts of every man, woman, and child, and every state and movement of every event happening on this planet *at this instant*, but God has before Him the current realization of all the thoughts and actions of his creatures, and every state and movement of every event happening on this planet in the past. But also He has before Him even now all that ever will occur in the future. God is also presently aware, if we can use that expression, of all contingencies that could have possibly have occurred if any or all thoughts or actions of men or history had any of his creatures decided to take different courses of action.

And so, Paul glorified God for both His wisdom and knowledge. "Oh, the depth of the *riches* of the *wisdom* and *knowledge* of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

After the apostle exclaimed wonder and praise regarding the riches, the wisdom, and the knowledge of God, Paul expressed that God is incomprehensible. In **Romans 11:33b-34** we read, "***How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?***"

The word incomprehensible speaks of our inability to truly know or understand God because of his infinite nature and because of our finite nature. Here is a statement of this truth from our Baptist Confession:

The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection; ***whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself***; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, ***incomprehensible***,...

And so, we see that the same idea is repeated here. When we speak of God, ***whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself***, we are saying that God is incomprehensible. Are we not? And so, this attribute seems to be rather redundant in the stated confession.

This speaks of the need of God to reveal Himself to us if He is to be known. God not only needed to reveal Himself to us in history, which we describe as God's revelation of Himself, but need God to give each of us understanding of that spiritual truth, God's work of illumination in our souls. This is a work of the Holy Spirit in which He reveals the reality and the significance of biblical truth to individuals. Either while reading the Bible or hearing the Bible taught, God enables people to understand through His work of illumination.

What of the incomprehensibility of God? When we speak of the knowledge that God possesses, we should recognize that it essentially different than the knowledge that we are capable of having. This is not merely because He is infinite in His knowledge and we finite, and therefore He knows more than we do. God knows differently than we do. Now this is the stuff that theologians think about and write about, but I thought

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<sup>11</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 2, p. 106.

that I would attempt to introduce the matter to us; after all, we desire to know God, to know Him to the degree that we are able. And so, it is important to understand that the knowledge that God is not just quantitatively different from ours, but that His knowledge qualitatively different as well.

How is this? How can this be? Well consider this: We have already shown that God has revealed Himself to us as one who is eternal, He transcends time. His knowledge being infinite in degree from ours, but it is different in kind than ours. There is both a quantitative but also a qualitative difference between our knowledge and God's knowledge. This works out in several ways.

First, and perhaps the most obvious to us, where God's knowledge is infinite in degree, the knowledge that we have is only partial. Second, whereas the knowledge that we have is learned by us, that is, increasing over time, God's knowledge is not acquired like ours. His knowledge is infinite in degree and is infinite from eternity. Third, where we are only capable of bringing forth our knowledge one subject at a time, and that only partially and singly, few of us can think clearly about two things at once, but God's infinite knowledge is immediate, always before Him. Fourth, our knowledge is sequential, thought follows upon thought, perhaps one thought flowing to another, but it is sequential. God's knowledge is not sequential, but is immediate, infinitely so. And fifth, and similarly, where we are in need of recalling knowledge from our memory, God's knowledge is in its infinity, is always present. God sees and knows all things at once. And so, when we speak of God being "incomprehensible" to us, it is betraying this idea, that God is so different from us in His essence than us, that we are not capable of knowing God for who He is in truth. We are finite creature of time, and then coupled with the debilitating effects of sin, we cannot comprehend God.

But then, can we know God? Of course. Can we know in a measure about God? Of course. But we must realize that for us to know God He must not only reveal Himself to us, as we spoke about at an earlier time regarding God's illumination, but God must condescend to us and reveal Himself in ways and in a form of knowledge that we are capable of comprehending. **John Calvin** said it this way respecting coming to know God and His attributes:

Thereupon His powers are mentioned, by which He is shown to us not as He is Himself, but as He is toward us: so that this recognition of Him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation."<sup>12</sup>

I am quoting Calvin in Michael Horton's book. Then Horton goes on to say:

Knowing God as He is in Himself was the familiar refrain of mystics and other enthusiasts of all ages, but God's incomprehensible majesty is damning rather than saving. God cannot be directly known by our climbing the scale of being, but can only be known in and through the Mediator... We must learn to receive God's revelation and redemption where He has condescended to us, in the lowliness of the manger, on the cross, and in the baseness of ordinary human language.<sup>13</sup>

Paul was overwhelmed by a sense of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God because he saw how utterly incapable he and all mankind were to comprehend what God was doing in history.

Now if God is in control of history, choosing among Jews and among Gentiles whom He will save through Jesus Christ, if God's wisdom and knowledge encompass all that has taken place on the grand stage of the history of nations, what does that say of His knowledge of you? If we contemplated this somewhat we would find ourselves as the psalmist. Of God he said:

<sup>2</sup>You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.

<sup>3</sup>You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith; A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.  
<sup>6</sup>Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is high,  
I cannot attain it. (Psa. 139:2-6)

This is how the apostle felt when contemplating the sovereign purposes of God that were unfolding in history.

The apostle concludes his doxology with these words: ***“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.”*** This is an expression of God being the source of all things (“from Him”) (sin and evil excepted), the cause of all things (“through Him”), as well as the primary purpose for all things (“for Him”). It describes God’s sovereignty over all things. Here are Matthew Henry’s comments of Paul’s words:

He resolves all into the sovereignty of God (v. 36): For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, that is, God is all in all. All things in heaven and earth (especially those things which relate to our salvation, the things which belong to our peace) are of him by way of creation, through him by way of providential influence, that they may be to him in their final tendency and result. Of God as the spring and fountain of all, through Christ, God-man, as the conveyance, to God as the ultimate end. These three include, in general, all God’s causal relations to his creatures: of him as the first efficient cause, through him as the supreme directing cause, to him as the ultimate final cause; for the Lord hath made all for himself, Rev. iv. 11. If all be of him and through him, there is all the reason in the world that all should be to him and for him. It is a necessary circulation; if the rivers received their waters from the sea, they return them to the sea again, Eccl. i. 7. To do all to the glory of God is to make a virtue of necessity; for all shall in the end be to him, whether we will or no. And so he concludes with a short doxology: To whom be glory forever, Amen. God’s universal agency as the first cause, the sovereign ruler, and the last end, ought to be the matter of our adoration. Thus all his works do praise him objectively; but his saints do bless him actively; they hand that praise to him which all the creatures do minister matter for, Ps. cxlv. 10. Paul had been discoursing at large of the counsels of God concerning man, sifting the point with a great deal of accuracy; but, after all, he concludes with the acknowledgment of the divine sovereignty, as that into which all these things must be ultimately resolved, and in which alone the mind can safely and sweetly rest. This is, if not the scholastic way, yet the Christian way, of disputation. Whatever are the premises, let God’s glory be the conclusion; especially when we come to talk of the divine counsels and actings, it is best for us to turn our arguments into awful and serious adorations. The glorified saints, that see furthest into these mysteries, never dispute, but praise to eternity.

We will conclude with the words of **Arthur Pink**:

Has God foreordained everything that comes to pass? Has He decreed that what is, was to have been? In the final analysis this is only another way of asking, Is God now governing the world and everyone and everything in it? If God is governing the world then is He governing it according to a definite purpose, or aimlessly and at random? If He is governing it according to some purpose, then when was that purpose made? Is God continually changing His purpose and making a new one every day, or was His purpose formed from the beginning? Are God’s actions, like ours, regulated by the change of circumstances, or are they the outcome of His eternal purpose? If God formed a purpose before man was created then is that purpose going to be executed according to His original designs and is He now working toward that end? What saith the Scriptures? They declare God is One “who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11).