

SERMON #1: WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

Doxologies: To him be glory....

By Bob Young

Introduction

Children need words of encouragement; children need praise but that praise must be honest and sincere. Coworkers, fellow Christians, spouses like praise. The praise we give to human beings is different than the glory we ascribe to God. It has a different source, it is not based in our nature, it is most often based on what we do. Biblically, “glory to God” is more often based in who God is.

Note the difference between benedictions and doxologies. Words of blessing or praise (benediction, good speaking), good words (eulogy), words of glory (doxology). Many doxologies do not begin with or include “praise.” However, a song known as the “the doxology” contains repeated praises. The differences between doxologies and benedictions are not always clear. I love biblical benedictions, I used them frequently in local ministry and preaching. I believe our fellowship, our spiritual sensitivity, and our faith would be strengthened if we used benedictions more frequently, especially those that pronounce blessings on others, and most certainly those that bless God.

The New Testament doxologies in this series all include a version of the phrase, “to him, to him be the glory.” A doxology ascribes to God glory and honor, it recognizes God’s honor and glory. Words of praise may also recognize God’s nature. I look forward to these sermons, because doxologies are about God, some specific aspect of God, understanding God. Doxologies put God first; then we can appreciate that our own circumstances that are far beyond what we deserve.

A doxology not only ascribes to God glory and honor, it gives reasons. This series will guide us through a study to understand the biblical reasons for giving God glory and learn how to duplicate in our own lives an understanding, a contemporary understanding, of some of the biblical reasons that undergird doxologies.

The order of the doxologies in this series is the order of their appearance in Scripture. The series will be an expository series, but it will “expose” a series of texts that are often not studied as related texts.

Text and Context

Romans 11:33,36, read 33-36.

Paul has just finished three “tough” chapters. He has written about things that are difficult to understand—God’s selection of Israel, God’s hope and plan for Israel as a means to include others, God’s rejection of the unfaithful in Israel, God’s inclusion of all who are faithful through the Deliverer out of Zion. We must not linger, our purpose is not to explain all the difficulties in Romans 9-11, our purpose is to say that this is for us a difficult text, it was for Jewish Christians a difficult text, it was even for Paul a difficult text. How should we respond to such profound thoughts?

God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge are without comparison.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

What are the deep “riches” of God? Col. 2:2 is perhaps parallel: riches of full assurance, treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Deep = places so deep that they have no bottom, no ending. Carlsbad Cavern, drop a rock in a certain pit and you never hear it hit bottom.

Depth of wealth (*ploutos*, abundance, richness, fulness). Riches signifies something of worth or value. Riches signifies sufficiency. A rich person is one who has what is needed. A person can be rich without much of this world’s goods if those goods are not seen as necessary. Riches speaks of completeness, enough, abundance, all. Col. 2 may use riches and treasure as synonyms. The riches of Rom. 11 are not physical. The word describes the God who never stops, never runs out. There is no end to God’s supply, bounty.

The focus is on God’s wisdom (*sophia*) and knowledge (*gnosis*). Knowledge and wisdom: information, and knowing what to do with information. Wisdom see the long-term view. Wisdom sees beyond the present. These verses focus on God’s ability to know all things. It is within God’s power to know all things. Because he is ever-present, his knowledge may lead to conclusions we do not understand. That is wisdom.

First item, God's wisdom is like no other wisdom in the world. There is no comparison. The Queen of Sheba lauded Solomon's wisdom. That wisdom was nothing compared to God's wisdom. Isa. 55:8-9, God has thoughts and ways so much higher than ours that there is no connection.

We struggle with faith because we have not seen the God in whom we want to believe. We have not seen in Jesus what God desires us to see. "He that has seen me...." We read selfishly, seeking benefit. We have not read the Jesus' narrative and seen wisdom, often we see only stories and facts. We miss the nuances, the little hints.

God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge are beyond our understanding.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Paul gives two examples of God's wisdom and knowledge. Some connect wisdom with his judgments and knowledge with his ways. I do not see a correlation. Wisdom and knowledge are for us separate, but in God's nature they are a unity. The results of God's deep wisdom and knowledge are beyond our understanding.

Judgments (*krima*, decisions, condemnations) beyond searching. His judgments cannot be plumbed. His condemnation cannot be grasped. Read in context, here is a description of God and Israel, God's rejection and judgment on his people in order to accomplish his purpose. The context speaks of judgment. Just as God's judgments are unsearchable, so also is God's decision to redeem and save is beyond our understanding.

Ways (*odos*) is a well-known word: Exodus, the way out. His way (journey), but in the context, his mode, means, way of making progress, his route. God does not get to the goal according to our expectations. The descriptive word means untraceable. It fits with the idea of paths. God cannot be tracked. His methods cannot be tracked by our feeble human reasoning.

Paul cites Old Testament passages to show that this was spoken by the prophets.

Because all things came from him, exist through him, and are for (to) him.

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

Why are the first two reasons for giving glory valid? Because God is above and beyond. God is infinite. God stands above all else. The phrases remind us of Col. 1:15-17. Col. 1 is about Christ; Rom. 11 is about God. They are parallel. They describe deity.

From him—beginning, through him—sustenance, to him—purpose. All things exist because God made them, he sustains them, he redeems them for his purpose. The focus is not on things. The focus is on Israel and all that surrounds Rom. 9-11. We ourselves are from him, through him, and to him.

Therefore...

To him be glory forever. Amen.

What response can one give but to ascribe to God glory? Later we will have to say something about the biblical concept of "glory," but for now, it is sufficient to say that glory is ascribed by our words, but even more so by our lives.

Paul transitions directly to Rom. 12:1-2. He makes the connection, we must make the connection. How can I this week bring glory to God? He is glorious by nature. How can I help others see his glory? This is how I bring him glory.

In view of God's mercy, judgments, and ways, I can respond...

- With a life of sacrifice
- With a life of sanctity
- With a life of service
- With a life that separates me from the world
- With a life that is shaped from the inside out