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The Judgments and Ways of God

Romans 11.33

Series: The God We Worship

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The Village Church

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I. The God Problem Revisited

- A. He had problems
 - 1. Lots of them
- B. He had been subject to natural disasters
 - 1. Disasters that destroyed his home and the buildings on his estate, in which he operated his businesses
 - 2. Twice!
 - a. Fire destroyed the structures once
 - b. And hurricane-force winds destroyed the home of his children when they had been gathered for a feast
 - c. His family had thus been taken from him in the prime of their youth
 - d. It was an awful loss!
- C. But he'd also been subject to the devastation of criminal gangs
 - 1. The gangs had descended on his businesses, stealing his products and killing his workers
 - 2. So his livelihood had been taken from him
- D. Not only had he tragically been stripped of his family and the workers in his business, and the loss of his properties
 - 1. He was also stricken with a health crisis
 - 2. He was overcome with a mysterious skin disease
 - a. Afflicted with a painful rash, with lesions producing seeping fluids and exposed flesh
 - b. It was like shingles only worse
 - c. And they covered, not just a portion of his body, but from literally head to toe
 - 3. Such suffering is hard to imagine in a world like ours – our little bubble, our paradise in the midst of a troubled world
 - a. But he could not escape such devastation
- E. And to make matters worse, the people around him blamed him for these disasters!
 - 1. The very people whom he believed were his friends were thus no help at all
 - a. They were like pouring salt on his wounds
- F. But in the final analysis, these problems were not his problems after all
 - 1. Now, his problems were real
 - a. And they shouldn't be diminished
 - 2. But they weren't his chief problem

3. No, he had a God problem
- G. You see, all these had taken place for reasons unknown to him
 1. They were Satanic in origin, to be sure
 - a. But God had allowed them
 - b. God had granted permission for the author of evil to inflict both natural and human-caused disasters against this man
 2. You see, the man was a believer; he trusted God
 - a. And yet, the cynical view was that the only reason he trusted God was for what he could get out of God
 3. So God, said, “We’ll see if he’s willing to keep trusting, even when all the creature comforts he’s enjoyed are stripped away from him”
- H. So, while all of these were real problems, the real problem was God
 1. He had a God problem
 2. His afflictions had left him mystified, confused, defensive
 - a. He demanded an audience with this God whom he had trusted so willingly for all these years
- I. So eventually, God showed up
 1. Job 38:2 (ESV) —
 - a. 2 “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”
 2. Job 38:4 (ESV) —
 - a. 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.”
 3. Job 38:12–13 (ESV) —
 - a. 12 “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, 13 that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?”
 4. Job 38:16–18 (ESV) —
 - a. 16 “Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?
 - b. 17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
 - c. 18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.”
 5. Job 38:35–36 (ESV) —
 - a. 35 “Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’?
 - b. 36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?”
 6. Job 39:26–27 (ESV) —
 - a. 26 “Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south?
 - b. 27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high?”
 7. Job 40:2 (ESV) —

- a. 2 “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.”
 - 8. Job 41:1 (ESV) —
 - a. 1 “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord?”
 - 9. Job 41:4–5 (ESV) —
 - a. 4 Will he make a covenant with you to take him for your servant forever?
 - b. 5 Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls?
- J. The man with the problems, of course, was Job
 - 1. But he may as well have been one of us
 - a. Who, in microscopic terms, can identify with one or more of Job’s disasters
 - 2. And yet, when he finally had his audience with God, all of his problems dissolved into insignificance
 - a. Not that his problems were not real, that his losses were not truly painful
 - 3. But Job’s real need was to know God
- K. Job 40:3–4 (ESV) —
 - 1. 3 Then Job answered the LORD and said:
 - 2. 4 “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.”
- L. Job 42:1–6 (ESV) —
 - 1. 1 Then Job answered the LORD and said:
 - 2. 2 “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
 - 3. 3 ... Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
 - 4. ... 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;
 - 5. 6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”
- M. Job never knew what was behind all his troubles
 - 1. But once he knew God, those things faded into the shadows of life
- N. Tozer: The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems, for he sees at once that these have to do with matters which at the most cannot concern him for very long; but even if the multiple burdens of time may be lifted from him, the one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down upon him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled one upon another. That mighty burden is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably.
- O. Last week we went back into our study of Romans, in the series The Pure Gospel
 - 1. For we had finished Romans 11 just before Advent, covering in one message the glorious doxology at the end of the chapter
 - 2. But I mentioned that this doxology is too rich to pass quickly by

3. That the doxology was overwhelmingly about God
 - a. And we needed to stop, and take the time to encounter the God behind the glorious gospel
4. That what better way to begin a new year than to engage with the God we worship
 - a. Discovering His nature and character
- P. Tozer: What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.
 1. Job learned that the hard way!
 - a. We should learn it any way we can!
- Q. **Romans 11:33–36** (ESV) —
 1. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
 2. 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”
 3. 35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”
 4. 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

II. **The Depth of the Riches**

- A. Our text begins, “Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God...”
 1. And last week we explored the wisdom and knowledge of God
 2. And this week we’re going to explore his judgments and ways
- B. I’d like to back up a bit and comment on “the depth of the riches” part of that statement
 1. What we have in this verse is a veritable cascade of attributes of God
- C. We saw that God is perfect in **Knowledge**
 1. That He alone knows all things perfectly, from beginning to end
 - a. That He learns nothing because knows everything and always has, from all eternity
 2. He knows all things, after all, because His is the creator of all things
 - a. And He is even the creator of time, as the Genesis creation account reveals, so He knows everything throughout time as if it were all the same to Him
- D. And then we saw that God’s knowledge is then shown to be applied perfectly in **Wisdom**
 1. Wisdom being the perfect means by which to accomplish God’s perfect end or goal
 - a. And God’s perfect end or goal is to glorify Himself
- E. But then the text continues with His **Judgments**
 1. His judgments are the embodiment of His eternal decrees, the decisions He makes to orchestrate all the events of His creation in order to wisely apply His knowledge
- F. And finally, we have His **Ways**, or His paths
 1. His ways are the actual employment of His decisions in time and space

- G. So you see, these four attributes are like the four horsemen, which give legs to His nature and character as He displays Himself in glory for all His sentient creation to enjoy and worship!
1. His perfect knowledge of all things
 - a. Leads to its application to the perfectly wise accomplishment of His goals
 - b. Which is then applied to His decrees or decisions
 - c. Which are revealed in His ways!
 2. Boice: ...this is the direction of the apostle's thought in these verses. Paul is marveling at the nature of God's ways. He begins with praise of God's knowledge, which is intuitive and infinite. Wisdom is a step beyond knowledge. It is the ability to perceive the proper, best, and most perfect means to achieve God's perfect ends. Still, at this point knowledge and wisdom are only potentialities. It is only when we get to the next step that the potentialities become actualities, as God's wisdom expresses itself in his decrees, and his decrees determine the path his decisions actually take in human history.
- H. This, at least, is part of what we encounter as the depth of the riches
1. There is certainly more to it than those things
 - a. But there is never less
 2. Knowledge, wisdom, judgments or decisions, and ways are intrinsically interwoven into the fabric of our world
 - a. Our natural world
 - b. Our spiritual world
 3. As God reveals Himself, and shows His glory
 - a. Most notably through the gospel – which is what Romans is all about
 - b. But truly about everything through which God reveals His nature and character

III. The Decider in Chief

- A. George W. Bush had a way with words
1. Now his way with words was not of the poetic variety
 - a. Remember, he was the one who coined the term “misunderestimating”
 - b. He was referring to how his detractors often discounted his capacities for accomplishing his political goals
 - c. And he often played fast and loose with the English language even as the points he made were often self-evidently true
 - d. There is an entire catalogue of “Bushisms” as a result
- B. One of the other “Bushisms” is the word “decider”
1. A lot of his detractors wanted to say that others in his administration were making all the decisions
 - a. That Karl Rove was making the political decisions

- b. That Donald Rumsfeld was making the decisions about defense strategy
 - c. That Dick Cheney was managing the White House
 - d. That Condoleezza Rice was making the decisions in foreign policy
 - 2. But Bush would dispel those theories by saying, “I’m the decider”
- C. This led to yet another phrase which has been applied to, not only President Bush, but to every president since
 - 1. **The Decider in Chief**
- D. Of course, the concept of the Decider in Chief predates Bush by decades
 - 1. It was Harry Truman who made much of the notion that “The Buck Stops Here” which he had inscribed on a plaque on his desk
 - 2. But unfortunately, the perceived capacity that presidents of these United States has for deciding things, and actually seeing those things brought to fruition, has been greatly exaggerated
 - 3. Presidents don’t have nearly as much influence that either they, or the media, or even the public, imagine
- E. That’s why the idea that the Decider in Chief as applied to mere mortals, presidents included, ought to be retired
 - 1. Because ultimately, there is only one Decider in Chief
 - a. And that’s God
- F. Our text puts it this way:
 - 1. **Romans 11:33** (ESV) —
 - a. 33 ... **How unsearchable are his judgments ...**
- G. The word “judgments” is an interesting word in the Greek NT
 - 1. It is often used of God’s judicial judgments
 - a. That is, when God decrees adverse consequences for the sinful acts of human beings or nations
 - 2. But it is also used of decisions in general
 - a. And since it is used in parallel with God’s ways, that’s where the context leads us
 - 3. That it has to do with God’s determinations or decisions that drive His course of actions, or His ways or His paths
- H. So, whether it concerns judicial decisions, or the decisions about the course of events, “judgments” refers to the decisions God makes
 - 1. In other words, His decrees
 - 2. So God is truly the “Decider in Chief”
- I. The Westminster Confession of Faith places the decrees of God very much in the forefront of the confession
 - 1. And it introduces the idea of the decrees when it says,
 - a. “God from all eternity, did, by his most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”
 - 2. Yet we rarely hear of the decrees of God from the pulpits in our nation

- a. Because, as we observed last week, we imagine God to be like us
 - b. Always changing our minds about things
 - c. Making decisions one day, other decisions the next
 - d. Often changing direction based on our perceptions or values or whims
- 3. But God, who perfectly knows the end from the beginning, is not like us
 - a. And His decisions, His decrees, His judgments are essentially one!
 - b. Nothing ever catches Him by surprise
 - c. He's not perplexed about anything
- 4. He's the Decider
 - a. The only true Decider in Chief

IV. The Unsearchable Decisions of God

- A. Our text tells us that God's judgments are "unsearchable"
 - 1. The word for unsearchable means that God's decisions "cannot be searched to the bottom"
 - a. That is, we cannot discover their origin apart from His revealing them to us
 - 2. So what is it about God's decisions that are so hard to discern for us mere humans?
- B. God's Decisions are for His Glory
 - 1. We don't think about God's decisions that way
 - a. We usually think about God's decisions as they relate to our salvation, for our welfare and for our happiness
 - b. But the biblical witness is much different
 - 2. The Bible says that God created the world for His glory
 - a. **Psalm 19:1** (ESV) — 1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
 - 3. The Bible says that Jesus was sent into the world, surely to save us from our sins, but more critical even than that is that He came to glorify God
 - a. **John 17:4** (ESV) — 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.
 - 4. When we stand before the throne of God in the eternal state, what is it that we will proclaim?
 - a. That God has been so good to us?
 - b. **Revelation 5:13** (ESV) — 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"
 - 5. Boice: Most of us are hopelessly self-centered and subjective. But the universe and all that happens in it is first of all for God's glory, and not primarily for us, though we benefit from it and God does also have our well-being in view. Surely that is why the doxology in Romans 11 ends as it does. It does not end with man. Rather it ends with God: "For from him

and through him and to him are all things. / To him be the glory forever!
Amen” (v. 36).

C. **The Decisions of God are One**

1. Our decisions are partial and successive
 - a. God’s are one; one decision; one decree
 - b. Only God can look at the world this way!
2. **Psalms 2:7** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.
 - b. (Decree is singular)
3. **Romans 8:28** (ESV) —
 - a. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
 - b. (Purpose is singular)
4. **Ephesians 3:10–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
 - b. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord...
 - c. (Purpose is singular)
5. **Acts 2:23** (ESV) —
 - a. 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
 - b. (Plan is singular)
6. Charles Hodge: It is inconsistent with the idea of absolute perfection, that the purposes of God are successive, or that he ever purposes what he did not originally intend; or that one part of his plan is independent of other parts. It is one scheme, and therefore one purpose.

D. **God’s Decisions are Eternal**

1. **Ephesians 1:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him....
2. **1 Peter 1:20–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you
 - b. 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.
3. Boice: To think of any of God’s decisions as having been made in time is to suppose that some new circumstance, unforeseen by God, has occurred and that God therefore finds it necessary to accommodate himself to it. This would mean that God does not know everything perfectly, and it would make circumstances more powerful than God, since in some form or

another they would be dictating to him. If such were the case, God would not be God, and we would be back in paganism, with its impotent and very human gods and goddesses.

E. **God's Decisions are Wise**

1. **Psalm 104:24** (ESV) —

- a. 24 O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

F. **God's Decisions are Free**

1. Now, our decisions are free

- a. Free in that we decide based on what we want
- b. Our wills are certainly free in that sense

2. But our free decisions are within a framework

- a. We are limited in our opportunities, in our capacities, in our circumstances
- b. We may want to fly, but unaided to aeronautic technology, we, alas, are not free to do so!
- c. And it is God who determines the framework

3. God's freedom is pure and unlimited by any circumstance

4. **Isaiah 40:13–14** (ESV) —

- a. 13 Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?
- b. 14 Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

5. Arthur Pink: God was alone when he made his decrees. He was free to decree or not to decree, and to decree one thing and not another. This liberty we must ascribe to him who is supreme, independent, and sovereign in all his doings.

G. **God's Decisions are Absolute and Unconditional**

1. **Psalm 33:11** (ESV) —

- a. 11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

2. **Isaiah 46:9–10** (ESV) —

- a. 9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,
- b. 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

H. **God's Decisions are Effective**

1. We never know whether our decisions will be effective or not?

- a. But God's decisions never fail

2. **Isaiah 55:10–11** (ESV) —

- a. 10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

- b. 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”
- I. Those are a few of the reasons why God’s decisions, His decrees, are unsearchable
 - 1. We can only know of them through His revealing them to us through His word

V. **The Inscrutable Ways of God**

- A. Then our text speaks of the inscrutable ways of God
 - 1. The word for inscrutable is similar to the word for unsearchable
 - 2. Unsearchable means that we cannot trace back the decisions of God to their source or discern their origin
 - 3. Inscrutable means that we cannot determine where God’s ways will lead us
- B. That really bothers us
 - 1. We humans can’t help but try and figure out what God was up to and where He’s going with judgments and ways
 - a. And we speculate and prognosticate like we were Nostradamus
 - b. (And Nostradamus wasn’t too sharp at this either!)
 - 2. When I think of the phrase, “how inscrutable his ways” I can’t help but remember my dear friend from Morgantown who is now with the Lord
 - a. Dennis was a professor of organic Chemistry at WVU, a man who loved the Lord and His word
 - b. And we would regularly breakfast together and enjoy fellowship
 - c. And he would frequently say, “We’re always trying to unscrew the inscrutable!”
- C. But the ways of God are truly inscrutable
 - 1. Apart from the revelation of God, we cannot discern from our circumstances what God’s purposes are
 - 2. It’s like we’re always looking at the back of the tapestry
 - a. Where the threads appear to be a chaotic mess
 - b. But the front of the tapestry is what God is producing, and it’s a profound work of art!
 - c. But from our vantage point we cannot for the life of us, figure out where God is going with it all based on our perceptions
- D. There are many biblical examples of God’s inscrutable ways
 - 1. Ways in which it makes no sense to us in our human perspectives to figure out why God has pursued His particular course of action
 - a. Abraham
 - b. Moses
 - c. David
 - d. Israel as a nation
 - e. Even Jesus
 - 2. All have had to endure puzzling circumstances as God weaved His tapestry of redemption
 - 3. But I’m going to use another more contemporary example to drive it home

- a. An example that is actually quite close to home
 - b. The story of Elisabeth Elliot
 - c. It's close to home because she was the sister of David Howard, who is now with the Lord, but who was the husband of our own Janet Howard
- E. The broad outlines of her life are well published
 - 1. Her story begins as a young woman who went to the jungles of Ecuador as a missionary
 - a. She studied Spanish, and then began to work with two other ladies who were working on translating the Bible into the language of the Colorado language
 - b. They prayed for an interpreter who knew both Spanish and Colorado, and one came onto the scene
 - c. His name was Macario
 - d. But just as the work was begun, Macario was murdered
 - e. A terrible setback to the work; inexplicable from their perspective
 - 2. She continued the work, and at the end of a year she had produced more than a thousand vocabulary cards in a preliminary analysis of the Colorado language
 - a. She had produced a vocabulary and was teaching other missionaries how to use it
 - b. But one day when she was away, all her materials were stolen
 - c. They were never retrieved
 - d. A year's worth of work, down the drain
 - 3. The next stage in her journey was that she married Jim Elliot who was building a missionary outpost
 - a. But the post was destroyed by a flash flood and a year's work was washed down the river
 - 4. And then, many of you know what happened next
 - a. After about seven months of marriage, Jim and four other missionaries were murdered by Auca Indians, whom they were trying to reach with the gospel
 - 5. But Elisabeth continued her life in more ways than we can recount
 - a. And eventually she married Addison Leitch, who had been a seminary president
 - b. But not long after her marriage, he died a painful, slow death from cancer
- F. What did Elisabeth Elliot say about all of this?
 - 1. 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, through cancer, is not what you would call a proof of the love of God. In fact, there are many times when it looks like 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.

VI. **The Awesome Application**

- A. So, what are we to make of the unsearchable judgments of God and His inscrutable ways?
- B. Paul
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 1:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.
 - 2. **2 Corinthians 4:7** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.
 - 3. **2 Corinthians 4:16–18** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
 - b. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,
 - c. 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.
- C. Are you losing heart?
 - 1. When you began the Christian life years ago, did you have high hopes for a fruitful life and effective ministry?
 - a. And as the events of your spiritual journey have turned out, you wonder what became of the years?
 - 2. Life has not turned out as you expected
 - a. You are not the great saint you imagined
 - b. Your relationships have often been plagued by difficulty
 - c. Your health has taken turns that dominated periods of your life
 - d. Your children or grandchildren have not been the joys that you anticipated
 - e. Your business or occupations have run aground on the vagaries of economic or cultural shoals
 - 3. Your literally find yourself outwardly wasting away
 - a. And the irrepressible movement of time is taking its toll
- D. Know this:
 - 1. His decisions are unsearchable; His ways are inscrutable
 - 2. But His future for your is sure and certain
 - 3. **James 1:12** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.
 - 4. **1 Peter 5:4** (ESV) —

- a. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
- 5. You can trust Him!
- E. **Romans 11:33** (ESV) —
 - 1. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
 - 2. How unsearchable are his judgments
 - 3. and how inscrutable his ways!
- F. W.H. Burleigh
 - 1. Our eyes see dimly 'til by faith anointed,
 - 2. And our blind choosing brings us grief and pain;
 - 3. Through him alone, who hath our way appointed,
 - 4. We find our peace again.
- G. We can truly trust Him