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God All-Sufficient

Romans 11.34-35

Series: The God We Worship

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The Village Church

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I. **What is Man?**

- A. Theodore Roosevelt was larger than life
 - 1. He was the kind of man who took the oxygen out of the room when he entered
 - a. He was always the dominant personality
- B. While his life began in a sickly state – he was afflicted with severe asthma – he responded by over-achieving in nearly every facet of life
 - 1. His routines included extensive physical exertion, and boxing to avoid being bullied
 - 2. His inquisitive mind led him into zoology and ornithology as well as history and biology
 - 3. At Harvard he participated in both rowing and boxing
- C. He published scholarly books and articles in multiple disciplines
- D. His political accomplishments were nearly unparalleled
 - 1. US Civil Service Commission
 - 2. NYC Police Commissioner
 - 3. Assistant Secretary of the Navy
 - a. From which he resigned to form the First US Volunteer Cavalry Regiment in the Spanish-American War
 - b. Where he rose to fame as the leader of the Rough Riders with his fearless charge up San Juan Hill
 - 4. Governor of NY
- E. He became the 26th President of the United States in an odd set of circumstances
 - 1. He was deemed too hot to handle by the Republican political elites, so they connived to get him elected as Vice President with William McKinley as the nominee for President
 - a. They figured the least influential place for him to be was the vice presidency
 - b. And he, as expected, was bored to death
 - 2. But death would change that, as McKinley succumbed to an assassin's bullet 6 months into his presidency
 - 3. Roosevelt was thus thrust into the presidency
- F. And an active president he would be, throwing himself into addressing a variety of social problems
 - 1. Busting trusts

2. Resolving coal strikes
 3. Prosecuting corruption within his own administration
 4. Regulating railroads
 5. Reforming food and drug administrations
 6. Conserving natural resources, including the establishment of the US Forest Service and the creation of five national parks
- G. In foreign affairs he won the Nobel Peace Prize for resolving the Russo-Japanese War
1. He took over the construction of the Panama Canal
 2. Grew the military and arguably under his leadership the US became a dominant world power
- H. These and many other accomplishments too numerous to name more than explain his inclusion on Mount Rushmore
1. Of course, the ideological significance of many of the things Roosevelt championed continue to be debated by scholars
 2. His approaches being owned and reviled, at one time or another, by the political left and the right
- I. But there was no debate about his personal dominance in a particular age of our nation's history
1. There was simply no greater personality
- J. But what many people don't realize about Teddy was that he was a man of deep personal faith
- K. William Beebe was a noted naturalist, biologist and explorer
1. And he was a personal friend of Teddy's
 2. He told the story of his spending time with the President at his home at Sagamore Hill on Long Island
 3. They had a regular sort of game that they played at the conclusion of an evening of dinner and conversation
 4. They would go out onto the lawn outside the house, and at a time when there was very little light pollution in that area, would gaze at the star-studded sky
 5. They would search the sky until they found the constellation Pegasus
 6. And in the lower left corner of Pegasus they found a faint spot of light
 7. When they found it, one or the other of them – they both took turns, it seems – would recite the following:
 - a. "That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as the Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun."
 8. And the Roosevelt would say,
 - a. "Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed."
- L. It takes a truly great man to know how truly small we are!
- M. We've been exploring the great doxology at the end of Romans 11 in our series on Romans
1. This series within a series is entitled **The God We Worship**

2. As we begin this new year it is more than appropriate that we consider who is this God we worship
 - a. And this doxology says a lot about God
- N. **Romans 11:33–36** (ESV) —
 1. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
 2. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
 3. 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”
 4. 35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”
 5. 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things.
 6. To him be glory forever.
 7. Amen.
- O. The first verse in this text focuses on the nature and attributes of God
 1. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
 2. “How unsearchable are his judgments
 3. “And inscrutable his ways!”
 4. The knowledge of God – the God who knows everything and all things
 5. The wisdom of God – the God who applies the wisdom to the most perfect accomplishment of His goals
 6. The judgments of God – the decisions, the decrees, that God has made in eternity to pursue the accomplishment of His purposes
 7. The ways of God – the actual orchestration of events by which God fulfills His perfect purpose
- P. But now, in vv 34 and 35 we have a change in perspective
 1. We move from the divine perspective to the human
 - a. From speaking about God in Himself
 - b. To speaking comparatively about God from our human perspective
 2. “Who – what human – has known the mind of the Lord?”
 3. “Who – what human – has been his counselor?”
 4. “Who – what human – has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?”
- Q. Those are rhetorical questions, of course
 1. The answer – no one!
 2. No human can begin to fathom the mind of God
 3. No human could ever hope to give God any counsel or advice
 - a. How preposterous that would be!
 4. No human could ever give something to God as if to repay Him for His abundant and manifold blessings
- R. Roosevelt would have resonated with these verses
 1. And even more, with the sentiments of David in Psalm 8
 2. **Psalm 8:1–4** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens....
 - b. 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

- c. 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
 - 3. And we, like Teddy and David and many other truly great people throughout history, would say, “Now, I think we are small enough.”
- S. Verses 33 and 34 are parallels
 - 1. Verse 33 speaks of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God
 - 2. Then verse 34, in reserve order, contrasts these attributes to the very limited attributes of human beings
 - 3. V 33: Oh, the depth of the knowledge of God!
 - a. V 34: Who has known the mind of the Lord?
 - 4. V 33: Oh, the depth of the wisdom of God!
 - a. V 34: Who has been his counselor?
- T. And even v 35 echoes the second half of v 33
 - 1. V 33: How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
 - a. V 35: Who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?
 - 2. Even v 35 contrasts the ways of man v. the ways of God

II. God the Thinker

- A. As humans we think much of ourselves
 - 1. As we compare ourselves with ourselves, we can always find other humans to which we compare favorably
 - a. Many are more intelligent than we are
 - b. And of course, we can find others who have fewer intellectual gifts than we do
 - 2. One of the classic works of art is the sculpture by Rodin – The Thinker
 - a. Scholars debate what Rodin was driving at in his creation
 - b. He may have been depicting the contemplations of Dante, as the sculpture was originally part of a larger display entitled The Gates of Hell, echoing Dante’s great work *The Inferno*
 - c. But whatever Rodin’s intention, the sculpture has come to represent one of the chief human characteristics
 - d. Thought, contemplation, meditation – are essentially human attributes
 - 3. But as humans, we see that we surpass the rest of the animal kingdom in intelligence
 - 4. Many naturalists, on the other hand, are quick to point out how intelligent some animals are
 - a. Dolphins, chimpanzees and elephants are usually at the top of the list
 - b. Most often because they have the capacity for communication and problem solving that other animals don’t have
 - 5. But of course, it’s ridiculous to compare even those animals to humans
 - a. Just check out dolphin libraries and museums, for instance
 - b. Oh, yeah – there aren’t any dolphin libraries or museums!

6. One of my favorite comic strips, second only to Calvin and Hobbes, is Gary Larson's The Far Side
 - a. Larson has made a career of personifying human attributes in animals of all kinds
 - b. But what makes Larson's strips funny is because they are ridiculous, even absurd!
 - c. Animals never approach the community and familial lives depicted in his strips
 - d. Non-humans are not even in the same continuum as far as intelligence is concerned
 - e. They say chimpanzees share about 98% of their DNA with humans – but what a difference that last 2% makes!
 - f. Again, just try to check out a book from the local chimpanzee library!
- B. Even David understood that kind of hierarchy of being
 1. Psalm 8:4–8 (ESV) —
 - a. 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
 - b. 5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.
 - c. 6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,
 - d. 7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
 - e. 8 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
 2. Next to the glorious expanse of the heavens, we are small indeed
 - a. Yet we possess qualities and characteristics that set us humans above the rest of the creation
 - b. It is one of the dimensions of our being made in the image of God
- C. One of those attributes is knowledge
 1. We see it in the first parallel in our text
 - a. V 33: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the knowledge of God"
 - b. V 34: "... who has known the mind of the Lord?"
 2. Knowledge is an attribute of God that we call a communicable attribute
 - a. Which means God shares His quality with His morally responsible creatures
 - b. We know things; lots of things
 - c. Of course, we think we know more than we actually know – but that's another story for another day!
 - d. But we know things
 3. In fact, the great philosopher Descartes focused on this particular attribute for resolving his doubt about his existence
 - a. He said, "I think; therefore I am"
 - b. His point was that the ultimate philosophical position was to doubt everything

- c. Until you got to the point that you found something you couldn't doubt, and then you'd work up from there to determine what is real and true
 - d. And his view was, if you were a thinking being – you must of necessity, exist!
 - e. Brilliant!
- D. But next to God, our knowledge is minuscule
 - 1. Last week we talked about Job
 - a. Remember, Job, with all his problems
 - b. But we saw that Job's real problem was his God problem
 - c. He knew a lot – but he didn't really know God
 - d. And once he had an encounter with God, his problems faded into the background
 - 2. But I'm also struck by the friends of Job
 - a. Remember – Job's friends were convinced that Job must have done something seriously sinful to have encountered all his problems!
 - 3. But it's interesting, on the face of it, Job's friends often have wonderful insights into theology
 - a. As one of my teachers used to say, they were more right than wrong
 - b. They had a lot of knowledge
 - 4. But they were just as ignorant as Job was for why he was in the predicament he was in
 - a. They had no idea that all of Job's problems were taking place because of God's encounter with Satan
 - 5. So you can have great knowledge, and completely miss the point of your observable circumstances
 - a. As both Job and his friends did
 - 6. Because compared to God, our knowledge, even operating at the highest level, is minuscule compared to God's
- E. Boice: But even in this area we do not measure up to God. In fact, our knowledge, wisdom, planning, and acting are so far from his knowledge, wisdom, planning, and acting that it is even less than the equivalent of comparing ourselves to the billions of suns in the great galaxy of Andromeda or to the many other galaxies. To put it another way, the only things we know, we know because God has known them first and has revealed them to us. Because we are so small, the knowledge we have is itself also pitifully small. Or to put it still another way, we have nothing to contribute to God in any area.

III. God the Counselor

- A. The second parallel in this passage has to do with wisdom; and God is the only wise counselor
 - 1. V. 33: Oh, the depth of the riches of wisdom...
 - a. V. 34: ... who has been his counselor?

- B. Once again, wisdom is a communicable attribute of God – one He shares with the morally responsible creatures
 - 1. And yet, once again, compared to God’s wisdom, our wisdom is minuscule
- C. Think of the book of Ecclesiastes – perhaps the central book of the biblical genre of wisdom literature
 - 1. And the overall message of the book of Ecclesiastes is the meaninglessness of nearly every dimension of human life – apart from the revelation of God
 - 2. The author – noted only as “the preacher”, and often identified with Solomon – points to the limits of human wisdom in the dimensions of human experience
 - 3. The structure of the book may be outlined like this: the meaningless of...
 - a. Wisdom
 - b. Pleasures
 - c. Wisdom and folly
 - d. Toil
 - e. Advancement
 - f. Riches
 - 4. Now, in our gut, we don’t act as if that were true
 - a. We believe in the sovereignty of God
 - b. And in His sovereign and good purpose for all of life
 - c. “God works all things together for good for those who are called according to His purpose” (**Romans 8.28**)
 - 5. So, what is the point of Ecclesiastes?
 - a. The point is that apart from God’s revelation, and from a purely human perspective, everything seems like it doesn’t matter
 - b. That life is meaningless
- D. Packer:
 - 1. Look (says the preacher) at the sort of world we live in. Take off your rose-colored spectacles, rub your eyes, and look at it long and hard. What do you see? You see life’s background set by aimlessly recurring cycles in nature. You see its shape fixed by times and circumstances over which we have no control. You see death coming to everyone sooner or later, but coming haphazard; its coming bears no relation to good or ill desert. Men die like beasts, good men like bad, wise men like fools. You see evil running rampant; rotters get on, good men don’t. Seeing all this, you realize that God’s ordering of events is inscrutable; much as you want to make it out, you cannot do so. The harder you try to understand the divine purpose in the ordinary providential course of events, the more obsessed and oppressed you grow with the apparent aimlessness of everything, and the more you are tempted to conclude that life really is as pointless as it looks.
 - 2. But once you conclude that there really is no rhyme or reason in things, what “profit”—value, gain, point, purpose—can you find henceforth in any sort of constructive endeavor? If life is senseless, then it is valueless; and in that case, what use is it working to create things, to build a business, to

make money, even to seek wisdom—for none of this can do you any obvious good; it will only make you an object of envy; you can't take any of it with you; and what you leave behind will probably be mismanaged after you have gone. What point is there, then, in sweating and toiling at anything? Must not all man's work be judged "vanity (emptiness, frustration) and a striving after wind"?

- E. But you see, only God can give meaning and purpose to anything in life!
 - 1. Through His revelation in the Scriptures and in the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ, do we have meaning and purpose!
 - a. That's why our mission here at TVC is "We are building a community of forgiveness, purpose, and hope in Jesus Christ"
 - 2. But from a purely human perspective, there is no real meaning
- F. Paul puts it this way:
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 1:19–20** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."
 - b. 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
- G. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God!"
 - 1. "Who has been his counselor?"
 - a. We have nothing to offer to God as far as wisdom is concerned
 - b. All true wisdom comes from God
 - 2. **Proverbs 9:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
 - 3. Boice: We can know because God is a God who knows, and we can acquire wisdom because God is a God of wisdom. But we will achieve neither unless we begin with him.
- H. Just as with knowledge, our only proper position is to humbly bow before the altogether all-wise, omniscient God
 - 1. Realize how small we are
 - 2. And worship Him and Him alone
 - a. And trust His revelation for gaining true knowledge and wisdom

IV. **God the Giver**

- A. Our final parallel is about God the Giver
 - 1. **Romans 11:35: "... who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"**
- B. This congregation is an especially generous congregation
 - 1. One of our great gifts to the kingdom is giving
 - a. We praise God for how we have given to the ministries
 - b. Of the Village Church
 - c. To our benevolent partners
 - d. And especially to international workers through the Great Commission Fund

2. But one of the things we do, in nearly every pastoral prayer, is recognize that in our giving, we praise the true giver of everything – God
 - a. We recognize the tithes and offerings of our people
 - b. But then we thank God for those offerings!
 - c. Because He is the one who has given us every good and perfect gift, and we are simply returning to Him what He has given to us
- C. C.S. Lewis perhaps best describes our state with respect to giving in this story in *Mere Christianity*
 1. “Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already. So that when we talk of a man doing anything for God or giving anything to God, I will tell you what that is really like.
 2. “It is like a small child going to it’s father and saying, ‘Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.’ Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child’s present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction....”
- D. **John 3:27** (ESV) —
 1. 27 John [the Baptist] answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”
- E. **God is never in debt to us**
 1. God does not owe us anything
 - a. We depend on Him for everything
 2. And yet, it’s easy for us to fall into this trap
 - a. That somehow God owes us something
 3. We do, not only in the area of giving, but also in the area of living
- F. We think God is in debt to us when we complain about our circumstances
 1. When we do that, we’re basically saying, “God, you’ve made a mistake. You should have done something for me that you haven’t done!”
 2. What do we think?
 - a. That God is going to say, “Oh, I’m sorry. I’m glad you pointed out my fault. I’ll try to do better next time!”
 3. I had a dear saint once say to me, “The 90's have not been kind to us.”
 - a. He and his dear wife had been going through some pretty discouraging suffering
 - b. I’m sure the 90's were difficult
 - c. But when you say, “The 90's have not been kind to us” you’re actually saying, “God, you have not been kind us in our 90's. You owe us better than this.”
 4. I don’t know if I’ll get to my 90's
 - a. I don’t know what kind of suffering my last years will bring
 - b. Like my mother-in-law said many times, as others have said, “Aging is not for sissies”

- c. I just hope when I go through those times, that I will not say, or imply, that “God has not been kind to me”
 - d. For He does not owe me anything
 - e. And my great fear is that when I’m in that state of mind, someone will play back to me this sermon...
- G. We also think God is in debt to us when we think that we have obligated Him by some kind of service
 - 1. That something we have done for the kingdom or for the church means that God is obligated to bless us
 - 2. R.A. Torrey told a story once
 - a. He was in Australia for a speaking engagement; someone passed him a note
 - 3. Dear Dr. Torrey: I am in great perplexity. I have been praying for a long time for something that I am confident is according to God’s will, but I do not get it. I have been a member of the Presbyterian Church for thirty years, and have tried to be a consistent one all that time. I have been Superintendent in the Sunday School for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years; and yet God does not answer my prayer and I cannot understand it. Can you explain it to me?
 - 4. Torrey read it from the platform: “It is very easy to explain it. This man thinks that because he has been a consistent church member for thirty years, a faithful Sunday School Superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years, that God is under obligation to answer his prayer. He is really praying in his own name, and God will not hear our prayers when we approach him in that way.”
 - 5. Ouch!
 - 6. Fortunately, the author of the note came to Torrey after the message and confessed that he had written it
 - a. “You have hit the nail square on the head. I see my mistake.”
 - 7. Praise God for that spiritual breakthrough!
 - 8. May we all realize that God is not indebted to us
- H. The best antidote to this kind of thinking is to remember what Paul has been teaching all through the book of Romans
 - 1. That the Christian life is all about grace
 - a. Grace is God’s undeserved gift to us
 - b. Undeserved!
 - 2. Our justification is all by grace
 - a. Our sanctification is all by grace
 - b. Our being chosen from the foundation of the earth is all by grace
 - c. God’s redemption of Jews and Gentiles is all by grace
 - 3. Everything in the Christian life, from beginning to end, is all by the grace of God
 - a. And grace has nothing to do with an obligation of God
 - b. As soon as we speak of God obligated to us in any way, we have left the domain of grace

V. **God All-Sufficient**

- A. All of this simply means that God is all-sufficient
 - 1. Our thinking, in its best form, adds nothing to God's intellect
 - a. In fact, in its best form, it is a mere reflection of God's intellect
 - 2. Our wisdom, adds nothing to God's wisdom
 - a. We are not, and cannot be, His counselor
 - b. He profits not a wit from our advice to Him
 - 3. Our giving contributes nothing to His accounts
 - a. We are giving only what He Himself already owns
 - b. And He is not obligated in any way to us
- B. God depends on no one
 - 1. He is the Great I Am
 - a. He is independent
 - b. We are the dependent ones
 - 2. He is our Savior
 - a. We owe Him everything; He owes us nothing
 - 3. And while we owe Him everything, we are debtors who cannot pay our debts
 - a. But by grace, through faith in Christ, He has paid our debt in full
 - b. He has written it off; No! He hasn't written it off
 - c. Christ has paid it for us!
- C. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!