

Oh the Depths!

Romans 11:33-36

“Oh the Depths!”

This is how Romans 1-11, the doctrinal section of this great book, concludes.

Given the shallowness of our age and false depths on display, who does not need His depths?

We live in a world that glorifies all the wrong things and eclipses true and lasting glory. It is quite a thing when those around us glory in what is not glory, glory in their shame. Who call evil good and call good evil.

It surely is right to reply NO to such ways! But let us also be found bowing the knee to the One with true glory. The Hebrew children said: ‘O king, we cannot worship your image, we serve and worship the true God!’

Paul knew this secret – he lived in the light of the knowledge of the glory of the true God shining in the face of Jesus Christ, and was transformed from glory to glory.

He is doing so here. Paul especially adores the sovereignty of God here.

The hardening of the Jews, the election of God, the Potter and the Clay, God’s mercy and justice, the wide open door to the Gentiles, the righteousness of the Gospel apart from the law, and the purpose of God toward the Jews in the present and the future. Oh, the Depths!

Today is just an introduction to these depths – surveying six of them.

We want to step back and behold in this multi-layered praise how all praise is to be His! God is mentioned 11 times in 4 verses!

Our first point is “O the Depths of God Himself!”

This is the true God, the God of purpose, the God of creation, the God of providence, the God of life and death, of judgment and mercy, the God of heaven and hell.

This is especially God who saves, who has THE ALONE remedy for sin. In verse, 32, we were all shut up under a hopeless disobedience. Why? So that God might show all mercy to all kinds of sinners, like us!

Romans begins in another depth – OH the depths of human sin! Of wrath upon the Gentiles. Of wrath upon the Jews. Of wrath upon the world! Oh the depths of Romans 3:23! For all have sinned and come short of what? the **Glory of God!** But by the end of this book, in Romans 15, we come to how all may with one accord and one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! And that runs through this verse.

“Oh the depths” of a God who is truly God, fully God, the only God who is sold out to saving us, by all his attributes, his powers, his names, in all his thoughts which are as high above us as the heavens above the earth. Oh the depths of God being fully for us – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit! Who then can be against us? What can separate us? If God be for us?

Now then, after the depths of God, see **secondly**, “Oh the depths of his **glory**”. This is the depths of his **heights!** God’s glory is his highest self.

Not only has God gloriously come near to you, to embrace and receive you, but he receives glory through saving you which exalts Him, places him where he truly belongs – Lord of all!

Oh the depths of the heights of his glory – to Him alone be the glory forever – O the worthiness of God to be honored, worshipped, adored, praise, and thanked, alone!

God is truly all-glorious, has always been, unchangeably. He is now above all the light and dark that is this fallen, prodigal world, and will be to all eternity.

Is he your glory? Is his glory big enough for you? Are you frustrated with living for lesser glories because God is not glorious to you? What is your chief end and glory and enjoyment?

As AW Tozer said 70 years ago, what we think about God is the most important thing about us. We can never rise above our concept of God, and that is why we are in such a mess!

O the depths of God! Oh the depths of His high Glory in grace to sinners!

Then third, **oh the depths of the scale of His sovereignty**. He is over all the world, the past in creation, the present in providence, the future in all things summed up in, and of and to him.

God is sovereign over all the works of his hands. He is the potter, we are the clay, no matter what our pretensions and pretendings!

Read Isaiah 40 – how small are we next to Him! All the universe taken up in His glorious power and might and dominion – is the work of his fingers!!

Listen to Psalm 33:8-12:

⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. ⁹ For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. **[there's the past]** ¹⁰ The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. **[there's the present]** ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation. **[there's the future]** ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.

Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God, said Edwards! So should we! Otherwise we serve a lesser god, perhaps no god at all!

If wicked, pagan king Nebuchadnezzar was made to bow the knee to the everlasting King of heaven; if angels bow and adore in his presence; if devils

tremble at the Son of God in his humility; we mere gnats have no room but to adore!

Oh the depths of God – His sole uniqueness; Oh the depths of his heights, his glory – His worthiness; Oh the depths of the breadth of His sovereignty over all – highs and lows, past present and future.

Thus three more which we can only survey in verses 33-35: oh the depths of his wisdom and knowledge; oh the depths of his ways and purposes; oh the depths of his wealth and riches toward mankind.

Or, oh the depths of the width of his truth reaching all; oh the depths of the lengths of his purposes toward this world; and oh the depths of the greatness of God to us.

Let us be clear that this is set all in the gospel – of concluding all under disobedience so as to show mercy unto all; freely redeeming lost sons and daughters who come to Him.

So fourth, **Oh the depths of the wide riches of gospel wisdom and knowledge – 33a.**

His great plan to save by the foolishness of the lowly cross – 1 Corinthians 1. God, whose knowledge is as exhaustive as it is extensive, who defines all truth by himself, who knows all things possible as well as all that comes to pass – is to be exalted as a God of the greatest wisdom and knowledge.

God's knowledge is very different than ours – ours is creaturely, limited, dependent, but God's is perfect, complete, independent and infallible.

There is no succession in God's knowledge – no before and after.

“Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?”

He is the all in all of knowledge, the Alpha and Omega. And at the center is the gospel revelation, the salvation of God which is styled the wisdom of God, the knowledge of God, the truth which saves

This glorious wisdom and knowledge widely reaches to all mankind – it is so perfectly fitted to save all kinds of sinners! This is a gospel for the whole wide world!

Then alongside, and fifth, **oh the depths of the lengths of his purposes – 33b, 34.** How incomprehensible and unfathomable his steps, his paths, his actions.

The word “judgments” is not to be taken narrowly as a few judicial decisions. No, this is as one has put it, “God’s sovereign decisions, decrees and disposals.” This is his rule over everything. God is judge of all, ruler of all, past, present and future, as we saw in Psalm 33.

This is a purpose arising from eternity, manifested in time, and carries all forward to the future. This touches on the Lord’s predestination and fulfilling his decrees, so as to glorify himself, bless his people, and exalt his righteousness over all enemies.

We cannot exhaustively search or seek them all out; we cannot trace his footsteps – the word ‘unfathomable’ means cannot be tracked.

This is the high and inscrutable nature of God, who does things so surprising and yet so wonderful to us. Man cannot measure God; we are like a mosquito next to the sun! We are creatures of yesterday, already gone. You and I will be dust and ashes before we know it! Our time is so short! He is eternal, infinite, immortal and immutable.

Gordon Keddie shares the story of a building on the campus of Harvard University. It was intended for the philosophy department of the great school. The instructors put their heads together and wanted to put on the outside the ancient and lines of the Greek philosopher, Protagoras: “Man Is the Measure of All Things.” But the President of the college, when he heard about it, intervened and changed what was put on the front. He chose Psalm 8, verse 4: “What Is Man That You Are Mindful of Him?”

What a rebuke to the claimed autonomy of man from God!

Do you know and embrace God's saving purpose, his Son, the Gospel? You cannot glorify him or enjoy him personally apart from the saving blood of the Lamb provided for you!

That word autonomy used by Keddie is a good Segway into our sixth and last point – **O the depths the fullness of his wealth!** Verses 34 and 35 is a blend from Isaiah and Job, on how transcendent and independent is the Lord, and how limited and dependent are we!?

But we would not think that, or live that way in our sinfulness. We want to think we well understand God and have great ideas for Him as his counsellor. Like the person who said she couldn't wait to get to heaven so she could give God a piece of her mind. What a shocking thing, right?

But deep down, this is our dilemma – we know better than God does, therefore we ignore him, his word, his ways. And even when our ways blow up in our face, we still do not change. Why, we even then blame God!

But the point of these lines is not to expose our self-sufficiency but to highlight the all-sufficiency of the Lord and his gospel! His truly great mind and counsel comes to you freely and fully to be the great answer for your life, your soul, your eternity!

Salvation is not a tradeoff, a bargain – do this and God will do that; be this way and the Lord will, by your goodness and merit, reward you – he has to! Everything is already of him in creation time and to eternity. Why would we think salvation would be any different? When we give to him, we are only giving what is already his.

But the Lord is not asking you to give; to establish your own righteousness and acceptance; no, he gives that freely and fully as a gift in His wonderful Son. This is really saying “Oh the depths of the wonder of his grace!”

What can we possibly give unto him to bring him in our debt?

Let our whole lives sing out the words of Isaac Watts:

Where the whole realm of nature mine –
that were a present far too small –
love so amazing, so divine –
demands my life, my soul, my all!

We will come back and expand on these later points next week. But here let say and respond:

- Oh the depths of God.
- Oh the depths of the heights of his glory – how worthy is He.
- Oh the depths of the breadth of his sovereignty – all praise, Soli Deo Gloria.
- Oh the width of His gospel **wisdom**.
- Oh the lengths of His gospel **plan** – authoring, accomplishing and applying redemption through a Mediator.
- And, Oh the riches of his gospel fullness that reaches even me!

Oh! OH! Is that the exclamation of your life? This happy little word, “OH”? Are there “OH’s” in your life? Of astonishment, amazement, awe and admiration? It is a little word that says we have no words, in any language to express the depths that are here!

Haldane says it arises from the “The absolute impossibility of giving utterance to the boundless and [immeasurable] incomprehensibility of God”.

Oh let the dimensions of Jesus thrill and awe you – overawe you! That he, according to the riches of his glory, would so fill you, that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of knowing the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:20-21)