

THEOLOGY AND DOXOLOGY

Douglas Wilson
Christ Church - Moscow, ID
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INTRODUCTION:

Paul's response to the very dense theology he has been working through is to break out into song. His theology bursts forth into doxology. These are not two unrelated things—rightly done, rightly understood, theology leads inexorably to praise. Let's consider why.

THE TEXT:

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

The wisdom and knowledge of God have deeps that cannot be comprehended (v. 33). His judgments and His ways are beyond finding out (v. 33). Who could begin to undertake such a search (v. 34)? Who has known the mind of the Lord (v. 34)? Who could dare to volunteer to walk into the throne room of God to give Him advice (v. 34)? Who is able to give to God in such a way as that God needs to repay him? Who can place God in debt (v. 35)? These are all rhetorical questions, the assumed answer to which is no one. And the reason the answer is no one is that all things are of Him, and through Him, and to Him (v. 36). He is the one responsible for all that is, and He is the one who receives glory for all that is (v. 36). And amen.

ALL THINGS:

Take a glance at the number of stars revealed in a photograph from the Hubble telescope. The God we worship knows every one of those stars by name (Ps. 147:4). The hairs on every head are all numbered (Matt. 10:30)—about 7 billion people are alive today, and the average number of hairs on a head range between 90,000 for redheads and 140,000 for blonds. God numbers them all. Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of the Father (Matt. 10:29). God simply spoke and the vast expanse of heavens and earth came into being (Gen. 1:1; John 1:3). The human body contains somewhere between 50 and 75 trillion cells, each one an exquisitely made library, each with the capacity to manufacture what the information in its library tells it to. Every last bird that hops from branch to branch in the deepest wilderness is known to God (Ps. 50:11). Every raindrop is prepared by God (Ps. 147:8), and does not hit your forehead accidentally. He gives food to ravens (Ps. 147:9), and uses ravens to give food to the prophet (I Kings 17:4). Galaxies, oceans, mountains, nations, planets, giant stars, and all such things added together are just dust on His scales (Is. 40:15). “Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast” (Ps. 36: 6). His understanding is infinite (Ps. 147:5). It must be—for of Him and through, and to Him, are all things (Rom. 11:36). Never forget the Godness of God.

MIGHTY TO SAVE:

Now this God—can He save the Jews along with the world? Of course He can (Rom. 11: 23). God is clearly able to do this. But will He? If He is the one who cares for sparrows the way He does, what should we conclude from this? We are worth more than many sparrows (Luke 12:7). The psalm that tells us a number of these glorious natural gifts is also the same psalm that tells us that He gathers the outcasts of Israel (Ps. 147:2). The God who governs is the God who saves. We do not divide up the world—the God of nature is the God of grace. The Creator is the Redeemer, and the Savior is the one who spoke all things into existence.

REMEMBERING TWO THINGS:

This is the doxological conclusion to a very densely reasoned passage of theology, chapter after chapter of it. But for many people, the chapters immediately prior can be summed up by “God can damn who He wants; deal with it.” With regard to His authority and power, that is true enough (Rom. 9:18). We don’t deserve His mercy. He has the strength to condemn us, and no injustice would be involved if He did. But this stretch of Romans deals with two fundamental issues. The first is the divine nature of His authority. God is God, and we shouldn’t try to pretend otherwise. The second is that this is power of the God who has determined to save the world. Two things must be remembered—His power and His intent. Can He destroy? Yes. Will He save? Emphatically, yes. We need to be humbled down to the ground, true enough. But this humbling is not the prelude to the world’s damnation. It is the threshold of salvation for all men, for all who believe. And here is the kicker—the world will believe.

WHO HAS BEEN HIS COUNSELOR?

When we emphasize (as we ought to) how strong the power of His right arm actually is, we then make the mistake of believing that He is going to use that strength in order to strike the world, and all the sinners in it, such that they are blown to smithereens. Christians who emphasize God’s power tend to believe that He doesn’t really want to save anybody, but will save a few reluctantly. Those who emphasize His love (forgetting his justice, holiness and power) tend to veer off into a soupy sort of sentimentalism. We insist upon both. God hates sin, and He will make short work of it on the earth. God loves the world, and He did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world (John 3:17), but rather that the world through Him might be saved.

Now, by “saved” we mean saved. You mean saved saved? Yes—Africa, South America, North America, Europe and Asia, Australia, and the weather stations in Antarctica. All those people? Yes—red, and yellow, black and white. All those. As soon as this sinks in, what do we want to do then? We set up shop to be His counselor. We tell Him that all this is eschatologically irresponsible. We search out His judgments and bring them under review. His ways, which are past finding out, we claim to have found out.

Nebuchadnezzar came to understand that God’s hand of rule could not be stopped (Dan 4:35). But neither can He be stopped when He stretches out His arm to save.



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