

Sovereign Over Us (and Everything Else)

Romans 11: 30 - 33

- When I was a senior in high school, the pastor of my church sat down with me, as he did with all who were about to graduate, and asked me what my plans were going forward. In reply, I mumbled something to the effect of, “I dunno. I was kind of maybe thinking about going into the ministry.”
 - He looked at me and said, “Ministry is not something that you kind of think about. If your heart doesn’t say, ‘Woe is me if I don’t preach the Gospel,’ then you have no business going into the ministry.”

1 Corinthians 9: 16 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

- I didn’t get it. I thought, “How rude.” Here I am wanting to be a pastor and he was discouraging me. I understand now, but I didn’t then.
- Looking back, and knowing my people pleasing self much better, I was probably just saying that because I thought it would make him pleased with me, seeing me as a good religious boy that I really wasn’t at all.
- To borrow Paul’s words from Romans 7: 24, what a wretched man I was, and I had no clue. I am not sure that even now I really have a clue as to just how wretched I am, because the wretchedness is kind of like peeling the layers of an onion. It’s layer after layer. More and more along with Paul I see:

Romans 7: 18 nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

- In many ways, it was devastating and crushing to get to that point in my life. To the point where I literally felt, “Woe is me if I don’t preach the Gospel.”
 - Because I was such a slow and hardheaded learner, God had to put me through the equivalent of 30 plus years of boot camp—breaking me down, showing me that I had nothing but the Gospel. Before I could preach the Gospel, I had to learn to love the Gospel. And I couldn’t learn to love the Gospel until I saw the truth of who I was.
 - From the perspective of the world, it was the worst experience that you would never wish for another person to go through. But the world’s perspective is always wrong, and that was the case here.
 - The reality is that all those worst experiences were the best, because, in his sovereign love and mercy, God used all the brokenness to show me that all I had was Jesus. And because of that, I finally understood, “Woe is me, if I don’t preach the Gospel.”
 - Apart from the Gospel, I have no wisdom, no knowledge, no riches to offer you. Because only the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, is the wisdom, knowledge, and riches of God. Woe is me if I don’t preach the Gospel because anything else is a poor substitute.

Acts 20:24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.



The Gospel is everything. I am of no account without it. Whether you know it or not, you and your life are of no account without it. The Gospel is not just how you get saved. It is what gives everything that happens in your life meaning.

- It was all the bad things in life, all the things that I wouldn't wish on another person, that God used to bring me to my knees, to the end of myself, so I could finally find real righteousness and life in Jesus.
- One day, when I stand in glory, I will glorify God for all the bad stuff that He allowed to come into my life, because in large part, it was the bad stuff that brought me to Jesus and in turn to glory.

Romans 8: 28 – 29 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

- Think of what Paul writes there. Everything in my life, the good and the bad, are according to God's purpose. Why? To conform me to the image of Jesus. Can you think of anything more glorious than to be conformed to the image of Jesus—who, as Hebrews (1:3) tells us is the radiance of God's glory?
- If God has called you to himself, every detail of your life is being used by God for that purpose—to bring glory to himself by making you into the glorious image of His Son. Could there be any higher purpose and calling on your life?
 - And if that is true, that every detail of your individual life is being used by God to conform you to the glorious image of His Son, then think what that means.
 - It means that the Gospel, what God is doing to save you, is the purpose of all of history. Think about what history is. It is a weaving together of all of the details of every person's life for the purpose of revealing the glory of God, in them, through the Gospel of Christ.
 - This is the point that Paul has brought us to, here in Romans 11.

Romans 11: 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

- In other words, the gifts, and callings by which God completes his plans in history are infallible. God designs and guides history irrevocably to save Jew and Gentile alike, to save you and me alike.
 - History is God carrying out His eternal decrees, sovereignly and providentially using all of His creatures and all of their actions to bring glory to Himself.

Ephesians 1: 9 – 12 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

- Who's plan is it? It's God's. How does it unfold? Through Christ. And what is the purpose of it all? The praise of His glory.
- If you belong to Jesus, you are part of that glory story. Everything happening to you is sovereignly ordained by God for the singular purpose of conforming you to the image of Christ for the glory of God.
- Could your life, and what God is doing in your life, have any higher calling and purpose than that?



- In our pride, we want to think that all of this is about us. We think salvation is about us. It's about me going to heaven someday. Me having eternal life. Those things certainly are part of salvation, part of the inheritance that Paul speaks of in verse 11, but they are just parts of the whole. The whole is the praise of His glory.
 - This is why God is working in all the details of your life, in all of history—for the praise of His glory.
- Romans 11:30-32 is the summary of the main point of chapters 9 - 11, namely, that God has designed and guided history—both its disobedience and its obedience—so that in the end it will most fully display the reliability of his promises and the magnificence of his mercy—to prevent human pride and produce white-hot worship for all of eternity.

Romans 11: 30 – 36 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³²For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. ³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

- For from him and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. It's not about us. It is all about God and His glory.

1. Why is God's glory so important?

- First, there is no meaning or purpose to life apart from the glory of God.
 - The Hebrew word for glory is “kabud” and it literally means weight or heavy. When you give glory to something, you give that thing it's proper weight or heaviness. Does not the creator of all things deserve greater weight, greater glory than things created?
 - We get in trouble when we praise creation, rather than the creator.

Romans 1: 21 – 22 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

- Along with being right and true, giving praise and glory to the creator is what gives us lives, focus, meaning, and a right purpose.

*We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.” — C.S. Lewis, **The Weight of Glory***

- That is what happens when we give glory to the created rather than the creator. We miss out on infinite joy because we trade the gloriously infinite creator God for a momentary pleasure.
 - This truth, of God being the ultimate glory, is essential to your daily life if you will see it and feel it for what it really is. Think what happens to us when we trade the glory of God for the glory of a created thing.

- ♦ Take sex for example. One of the main reasons that the world and the church are awash in lust, deviancy, and pornography (by men and women—30% of internet pornography is now viewed by women)—is that our lives are intellectually and emotionally disconnected from the infinite, soul-stirring glory of God.
- ♦ We've made sex and sexual expression a god.
 - Inside and outside the church we are playing in mud puddles of created things that are weightless in comparison to an infinitely glorious God.
 - Maybe that's happening in your life today. Think of all the things we seemingly spend our lives in endless pursuit of—money, sex, power, pleasure. Those things are nothing, but mud puddles compared to knowing the glory of God.
- The world is filled with the trivial, fleeting glory of momentary pleasures that we spend our lives in pursuit of and as a result we miss out on real glory.
- The deepest cure to our pitiful addiction to these trivial things is to, in heart and mind, be staggered by the infinite, everlasting glory of God. To see the sovereignty, holiness, wrath, justice, wisdom, truth, and mercy of God. Where do we see all of that? Only in the Gospel. Only at the cross of Christ.
 - At the cross we see God sovereignly moving in history to accomplish our salvation. At the cross we see the holiness, justice, and wrath of God. At the cross we see the wisdom, grace, mercy, and love of God.
 - That is why what Paul is saying here to us is so relevant and so life changing. It is meant to jolt us out of apathy, and I pray that it does.

2. What is God doing to make His glory known to you?

"Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." MacBeth—William Shakespeare

- Despite having everything he wants in life, despite being king and having the absolute power to do as he pleases, MacBeth is profoundly unhappy with his lot.
 - Separated from the glory of God, this is what our view of life and history will be. There is no overriding purpose in life, cosmic or otherwise. In that sense, our individual lives and all of history resembles a "tale told by an idiot."
- But here in Romans 11, Paul has a different view of life and history. All is moving together for one great purpose—to glorify God. History isn't a tale told by an idiot. It is a tale being told by God to extol the glory of God.

Isaiah 46:9-10 I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 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.'"

- God is the Lord, the master, of history in the most absolute sense. The nations of the earth—with all their billions of decisions each day—are not sovereign and are not random. They are "guided." They are "led," by God for God's purpose.
 - Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon during Daniel's captivity, came to know this full well.

Daniel 4:35 “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’”

- Now look how Paul describes God moving and working in history for the purpose of His glory, here in Romans 11.

Romans 11: 30 – 32 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³²For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

- If you don’t see that all of this isn’t about us, the creatures, but rather God and His glory, you are going struggle with the idea of God consigning all to disobedience. If we forget that we are the clay and God is the potter, we are going to ask:

Romans 9: 19 “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

- But remember Paul’s answer:

Romans 9: 20 – 21 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

- What right do we have to talk back to the creator? God’s purpose in all of this isn’t about us. It is about His glory.
 - God allowed the fall, allowed Satan to tempt and seduce Adam and Eve, because without the fall, without sin, there would be no way for God to display His holy justice. And if God’s holy justice cannot be displayed, then all of His glory cannot be displayed. And if all of His glory cannot be displayed then we and all of creation aren’t seeing God for all that He is.
 - And then consider the other side of the coin, how can we truly know the glory of God’s mercy and love, if it is not set against His holy justice?
- God didn’t make us sin and rebel. We freely chose that of our own accord.

James 1: 13 – 15 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

- But God allowed the choice and used the choice to display the glory of His just holiness, and His great mercy and love. Without the fall. Without sin, we would know neither and God’s glory would be diminished.

Romans 11: 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

- Think of God consigning all to disobedience as God saying, “Okay, you freely chose to disobey and sin, and I will allow that choice, so that I can display the glory of my holiness, justice, mercy and love through that choice.”
- And now I need to say just a quick word about the word all, in verse 32. If the word all means every single person, then what Paul is teaching is universal salvation. Every person sins and every person receives mercy.
 - But we have to interpret Scripture in light of Scripture, and if we do that, then we know that cannot be what Paul means. For instance, throughout the sum of his teaching, Jesus made it clear that not everyone would receive mercy.

John 5: 28 – 29 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

- Not everyone will be saved from judgment. So how do we interpret the all in verse 32? By remembering that in these chapters Paul has been talking about Jews and Gentiles as two distinct people groups. So here the all refers to Jew and Gentile alike. So read verse 32 like this:

Romans 11: 32 For God has consigned all (Jew and Gentile, alike) to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all (Jew and Gentile alike).

- Even in the immediate context, it is clear what Paul means by the word all.
 - First in verse 30, Paul speaks of the time of Gentile disobedience:

Romans 11: 30 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God.

- For a time, God consigned the nations to go their own way and sink further and further into sin. But while that was happening God called Abraham, and patiently wrote a lesson book for the nations in the history of Israel as he gave them the law and the prophets.
- But then Paul also speaks of a time in world history in which God consigned the Jews to disobedience.

Romans 11: 31 so they too have now been disobedient.

- This happened when the Jews rejected the Messiah, Jesus Christ. God consigned them to the hardness of their own hearts.
- But remember what happened as a result of Jewish disobedience.

Romans 11: 30 but now (you) have received mercy because of their disobedience.

- Once consigned to disobedience and wrath, God has now brought mercy to millions of Gentiles through the spread of the gospel to all nations and calling out a redeemed people of God—a fullness of the Gentiles. This is happening even today.
- And we await a final period in history of a time of mercy for Israel as God completes his redemptive plan and takes away their hardening.

Romans 11: 31 in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.

- Those are the four stages of world history that Paul mentions here, and those stages cover from the time of Abraham in Genesis 12 right up till the end of history. This is what Paul sums up in:

Romans 11: 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

- What is God doing in all of this? God's aim in history is to put an end to human boasting and pride and bring glory to himself, by magnifying the greatness of his absolutely free mercy.
 - At one time the Jews boasted over the Gentiles, so God humbled them by making their disobedience the means of Gentile salvation.
 - And what about us Gentiles? We are prone to boast over the broken off branches of Israel and brag that their disobedience was for our mercy. True. But then God stops our mouths: by making the mercy we have received the

mean by which they receive mercy. Our salvation becomes a steppingstone to their salvation. And all Gentile boasting is ended.

Galatians 6: 14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

3. How is God making His glory known to you?

- Think of how the cross silences all of our boasting. What does it say to each of us? That each of us is wicked and evil, so helpless, that the only thing that could save us was the death of God's own son. If that doesn't humble you to the dust, then you simply are not seeing the depths of your sin.
- God has consigned each of us to disobedience. But we are the ones who freely chose to sin, so we are completely responsible for our own condemnation. But in His mercy and love, God is the one who is completely responsible for our salvation. We are so sinful, so dead in sin, that we cannot save ourselves. But

Colossians 2: 13 – 14 You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

- The cross displays all of our sinfulness but it also displays all of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God.

Romans 11: 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

- We've already talked about one way the cross is the wisdom of God, and that is that it silences all human boasting.

Ephesians 2: 8 – 9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- But the cross also shows forth the wisdom of God because it is the unique solution to how God can be both just and merciful. Through the cross, sin is punished. The glory of God's holy justice is displayed.

1 Corinthians 1: 23 – 24 We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- But the cross, and all of history leading to the cross, also shows us the knowledge of God. There is no decision made by man, no action of man that God did not account for as He moved to save us.
 - Everything that Satan and man intended for harm, God turned to good so that His grace and glory would be proclaimed.
 - ♦ Just as God used everything in my life to draw me to Himself, He is also using every event in world history, from the fall of Adam and Eve to the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, to David's sin with Bathsheba, to Israel's hardness of heart and their rejection of the Messiah, to the persecution of the early church, to bring forth the Messiah, the cross and the spread of the Gospel.
 - Throughout history, Satan's intent has been to unravel God's plan and rob God of His glory, but in His sovereign wisdom and knowledge, God has taken evil and turned into good, to bring salvation to you today.

- But wisdom and knowledge aren't the only things that there is depth to with God. Paul also speaks of the depth of God's riches. What riches is Paul talking about? The riches of God's grace.

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.

- In wisdom and knowledge God has sovereignly worked in world history, and the history of your life to achieve His glorious purpose of making the depth of the riches of His grace known to you, so that you could be conformed to the image of His Son to the praise of His glorious grace. That's what it is all about. All of history, all of your life are for that purpose.

4. How then do we live in the light of God's glory?

- First, each day, we should humbly see the truth about who we are.

Romans 3: 22 – 24 For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus

- We are all sinners who are saved by grace alone, so there is no room for pride or boasting. Seeing the truth of who we are should humble us to the dust.
- It is only in humility, it is only in seeing the truth of our helpless estate, that we give glory to God by crying out for mercy.

Romans 9: 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

- Do you see that truth in your own life today?

- There are two ways you can live your life. You can proudly display your own virtue and goodness, or you can humbly display the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God. It is either or. You can't do both. You can rob God of His glory by trying to claim a glory of your own. Like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable about prayer.

Luke 18: 11 – 12 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

- Who is really being glorified there? If you are intent on trying to cover up sin, trying to maintain a good standing, trying to find a righteousness of your own, you will never proclaim the depth of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God because you will be too busy proclaiming your own goodness.
- But now think of the prayer of the tax collector.

Luke 18: 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

- Think of His simple prayer. There is God and there is the sinner, and what is in between? The riches of God's mercy. That is the very center of his prayer.

Psalms 51: 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

- A broken and contrite heart no longer seeks to boast in itself, but instead boasts in the depth of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God's sovereign mercy and love.
- God have mercy on me the sinner will not only bring salvation to your life, but it is also the most God honoring, God glorifying thing that your mouth will ever speak.