

Romans 11:33-36

Romans 11:33-36—Oh, 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.

Prayer

Pray that God will open your mind to understand His Word, and that your heart will be ready to respond to what He teaches you (Luke 24:45).

Introduction

Have you ever been awestruck by some amazing feat? Perhaps during the Olympic competition an athlete's ability has stunned you. Or a performance by a gifted musician caused an overflow of emotion within you.

That is the setting of this week's Fighter Verse. Paul is in awe as he contemplates the work and plan of God. In order to express the depth of his emotion, Paul uses a literary technique called a rhetorical question. He is not expecting an answer. He is expressing his emotion with force. Much like we might in saying something like, "Who could pull off a performance like that?" or "Was that an amazing triple full layout or not?"

Have you ever been in such awe of God that you didn't feel like you had words to express what was in your heart? (If you are doing this study with a group, you will be asked to share this experience in the discussion.)

Bible Study Tip— Literary Techniques

Identify literary techniques used in a passage.

Rhetorical

Questions: An answer is not expected; the answer is obvious; they are used to make a stronger statement of truth.

Remember: **Take a peek at technique.**

Part 1: In Awe of God

God's Wisdom and Knowledge

Think about an incident or situation in which you or another person responded with amazement or awe, perhaps a time when you saw someone doing an amazing stunt. What caused that feeling of, "Wow, that is incredible!?" The apostle Paul had the same sense of awe, but for a totally different reason. This is how he expressed his awe:

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1. What is Paul in awe of?
2. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

Here is one illustration that shows the difference between knowledge and wisdom:

- Knowledge is knowing that motorcycles can be dangerous. Wisdom is having the good sense to wear a helmet and to drive carefully.

Complete the "wisdom part" of the next few examples.

3. *Knowledge is knowing that icy roads can be slippery. Wisdom is...*
4. *Knowledge is understanding that if you disobey your parents you will be punished. Wisdom is...*
5. *Knowledge is understanding that paint can stain a wooden table. Wisdom is...*

Wisdom is taking your knowledge and making good decisions and right actions because of what you know. It is taking the information you have and making a good choice in what you do.

Paul understands that God has more than just knowledge. God uses the knowledge He has to make good decisions. That is why he says:

Romans 11:33b—How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

6. *What does unsearchable mean?*

- God’s judgments—or His decisions and plans—are so wise that we can’t even understand the goodness and rightness of them. They are “inscrutable” or mysterious to us.
- We cannot clearly understand the ways of God. His understanding is so great that we wouldn’t understand an explanation of why God does what He does. We just wouldn’t “get it.”

7. *When we say, "Oh, my!" what does that mean?*

8. *What does Paul mean by the expression, "Oh, the depth...?"*

- “The depth” shows Paul’s amazement at the extent or the amount. He is in awe of how much wisdom and knowledge God has.

God's Mercy Revealed in Redemption

Why is Paul in such awe of God's wisdom, knowledge, His plans and decisions? To understand this, you need to understand a very important principle or rule of Bible study: **Context is king!** We have to see what Paul is saying in the verses before our Fighter Verse passage.

To help you understand the context—or the verses around the Fighter Verse—an illustration might help.

Suppose you and your family and friends have been shipwrecked in the middle of the ocean. The situation is serious. There is no food or water. There are sharks in the ocean. And besides, everyone is so far from land that we will all drown. You are doomed. Drowning and death are coming.

But then a helicopter comes and throws down a whole bunch of life rafts to your family. But instead of being relieved and climbing in the life rafts, your family says things like: "We don't need a life raft. There isn't really any danger of drowning. No problem. We are just going to swim to shore." Some even yell nasty insults, "We don't need your help! Get out of here!" And they push the life rafts away.

So the person in the helicopter tells your friends that since your family doesn't want the life rafts, the friends can have them. The friends climb in the life rafts and get towed away to safety.

What about you and your family? You deserve to die. You did not appreciate the rescue offered. You proudly depended on yourselves and foolishly chose death. But after a few days, the helicopter comes back with more life rafts. You have another chance to live.

9. *How do you think you would feel?*

This is the context of Paul's statements in Romans 11:

- In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul shows us that God has clearly demonstrated that He is God. But everyone has turned away from God. We haven't honored Him or thanked Him. Instead we have all broken the law and loved our sin. We deserve death and punishment. We are "in the middle of the ocean full of sharks," drowning in our own sin.
- But God made a way for us to be "justified"—to be "declared righteous"—to be free from the punishment of sin through the sinlessness of one man, Jesus.
- God sent Jesus to the Jews, but they did not receive Him—they did not believe in Him or accept His rescue. Instead, they killed Him on the cross and depended on their own works to make them right before God. They are like those who refuse to get in the life rafts. But this was still according to God's plan.
- God had determined to rescue many of the Gentiles—those who were not Jews. And many Gentiles have accepted Jesus' rescue from their sin. They are like the people who got in the life rafts and were towed to safety. This is the good plan that Paul is talking about—God's unsearchable judgments and inscrutable ways.
- But God's plan is even greater than that! He will rescue the Jews who turn to Jesus after the full number of Gentiles have come in. He is sending the life rafts again.

10. *What does this second chance for the Jews show about God?*

Paul is so overwhelmed—so amazed—so in awe of God’s mercy¹ and goodness and the wisdom of God’s plan of salvation that he breaks out in worship of our great God:

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11. From what you know of Paul's life before he was saved, why do you think he was overcome with gratitude and awe of God's gracious plan of salvation?
12. Are you, like Paul, in awe of God's amazing plan to save sinners? Is worship and love for God growing in your heart?

Part 1 Summary

How would you summarize this part on Romans 11:33?

Application

Have you ever been in such awe of God that you didn't feel like you had the words to express what was in your heart?

End by singing a hymn or worship song, such as: *Amazing Grace* (John Newton); *Our God* (Chris Tomlin); *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* (Isaac Watts); *O the Wonderful Cross* (Chris Tomlin); *The Power of the Cross* (Keith Getty and Stuart Townend); *In Christ Alone* (Keith Getty and Stuart Townend).

Prayer

Pray the Fighter Verse for yourself and others.

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1. A simple definition of mercy for young children is: God's kindness to undeserving sinners.

Journal

Take your Journal to a special place and spend some quiet time with the Lord, thinking about today's lesson and praying that God would personally show you what God wants you to think, be, and do as a result. Quietly wait and listen for anything God might want to say to you in the Word. Then write about any new insights or specific actions God leads you to take.

This Week

- Memorize Romans 11:33-36.
- Encourage someone with this week's Fighter Verse.
- Check the Fighter Verses App for devotion and memorization quizzes. And, if you use the English Standard Version of the Bible, there are also Fighter Verses songs and trivia questions.
- Prayerfully consider how God would have you to respond to this teaching and record what the Lord has revealed to you in The Fighter Verses Journal.

Part 2: In Awe of God's Sovereignty

Romans 11:33-36—Oh, 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.

Illustration

Suppose Mark has always been interested in snakes and he has just finished reading a book on the most dangerous snakes in the world. He is so excited that he can't wait to tell his best friend about the book.

When Mark sees his friend, he says, "I just read the best book on snakes that I have ever read! I can't believe how much I learned about snake venom and how a snake, like the Papuan Taipan or the Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake, gets named the most dangerous in the world. Snakes are so cool!"

"I wonder if my mom would let me get a rattlesnake for a pet. Would she let it sleep on my bed like my cat does?"

Then Mark pauses and says, "My mom is smart and knows how dangerous snakes can be. She always tries to keep me safe. She's a great mother, and I'm glad she's my mom."

We are going to use this story to help us understand what is happening in Romans 11:33-36. In the first part of the snake story, Mark has just finished reading a book on snakes and is so excited that he wants to share what he has learned.

1. *How is this like the first part of our lesson about Romans 11:33?* (You might want to review some of the context statements in the introduction for the devotional on Deuteronomy 10:12-13.)

In the second part of the snake story, Mark is wondering aloud about whether his mom would let him get a snake. He is asking questions that both he and his friend know don't really need to be answered out loud. They both know what the answer would be. In the same way, in Romans 11:34-35 Paul is also asking

questions that don't really need answers, because the answers are obvious. These are called rhetorical questions.

Romans 11:34-35—“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?”

2. *What are Paul's rhetorical questions?*

3. *Does anyone know God and His plans so well that they could give Him advice?*

4. *Have you ever tried to give God advice, as if you knew better how things should be done, or how your prayers should be answered? (If you're doing this study with a group, you may be asked to share your answer.)*

5. *No one needs to give God something, as if He didn't have what He needs. Why not?*

6. *In our snake story, Mark didn't have to answer his own questions because he already knew the answers his mom would give. What did he know about his mother that made him certain that her answer would be “No”?*

Paul's questions didn't need answers either, because he knew something about God that made the answers certain.

Romans 11:36a—For from him and through him and to him are all things.

7. *What did Paul know about God?*

8. *In the snake story, Mark thinks about the wisdom and care his mother has for him. What do those thoughts about his mother lead him to understand?*

Paul has an even more awesome response from his reflection of verse 36a and all that he has written in the first 11 chapters of Romans.

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9. What is Paul's response in verse 36b?

10. What does that mean?

Think of some examples of how God's creation gives Him glory. For example: All the flower varieties show His creativity, artistry, and delight in colors.

11. How does your life bring glory to God?

Part 2 Summary

How would you summarize this part on Romans 11:33-36?

Application

How does knowing that God is sovereign and has a purpose for everything that happens in your life help you when you face difficult times? Is there anything in your life that you feel might not be showing the greatness of God or bringing Him glory? What steps can you take to change that?

Prayer

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