

Wow GOD!, ROMANS 11:33-36

Pax Romana 27

- **Intro:** “The ancient man approached God . . . as the accused person approaches his judge. (Can you picture that? You the accused have no leverage. The judge is able to arrange what he or she wants. All the force of law is on the side of the judge.) For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock (the enclosed space where a defendant is placed). He (man) is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the Bench and God in the Dock.” (*God in the Dock*, Lewis) Our text is a spontaneous exclamation of just the opposite of the way many of us suppose things to be: that God is God, and Judge, and Sovereign, and glorious, and ruler, and decider, and that everything and everyone answers to him (including you and me), and he does not answer to any of us, for anything, ever. God is the determinator. All the power, all the intention, all the goodness, all the hope resides in God and God alone! We are the made, he is the Maker. This is both fearfully humbling, and excitingly hopeful. But can we feel it?
- **1. We are all arrogant toward God, but few of us think so**, and my aim today is just to help us repent of that, and stop attempting to switch places with God.
- The Jews were arrogant toward God thinking he owed them salvation for being Jews for 2000 years, and obeying rules.

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The Gentiles were in danger of arrogance thinking that they had replaced the Jews as God's chosen because of something in them. And we are arrogant as well, expecting that God explain himself to us, rather than we answering to him.

•For example, we declare that there is no god or that we don't believe in him if our family is struck by tragedy that breaks our hearts, or if we lose a loved one in a war. Much like a child might decide mommy or daddy don't exist because she burned her finger on the stove while they stood by. (Perhaps there is a reason we don't understand). Or, we may not pray much until we need something and then if we don't get it we pray even less. This is our whole culture isn't it? If there is a God, he must convince me to love him, and I'll see what I think.

•Further, we the individual, claim the right to decide reality for ourselves. For all our claim that science and reason have made us the wiser, we are little different than the illiterate pagan who knows nothing of biology. Last week a man in the midwest identified as a woman in order to save \$97 on his car insurance, and the courts upheld it as his right! We don't even notice the incongruity. Like a fish that doesn't know what wet is because it's all it's ever known, arrogance toward God is all there is in our day, and we can't even tell. The holy scripture is here to tell us how it really is, and how we need to reposition with God. How can we see it?

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- **2. The doctrine of God's sovereign election is one of the best ways to test whether we have reversed roles with God.** This is the doctrine of sovereign election Paul praises in his doxology. It is a song of unbelievable relief and appreciation as one who knowingly recognizes his superior.
- Chapters 9-11 have been showing us repeatedly that God is sovereign, that he chooses what will happen in the earth, not us. He elects individuals and even nations to be who he wants them to be, whether to live in this century or that, whether to be born or not to be born. God determines whether we are black or white, male or female, tall or short, and yes even believer or unbeliever. All things are from him, and through him, and to him (v36). "All of history, all of it, is a canvas being painted by an infinitely glorious and mysterious Artist," says John Piper, "and the point of the painting is the revelation of his glory..."
- Wait a minute, we say, we are the captain of our own ship. Isn't the point of the painting that we get a fair crack at choosing our destiny? How silly to think God would claim the right to do what he wants with his clay. You don't believe that do you? (ch9, chapters 9-11 are hard on the modern mind.)
- As a result, many postulate things differently. God, they say, has decided to limit himself. He has determined to give up his power in one singular way. He may retain the power of the weather. He may retain the power of the solar system, and dark

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matter, and cell duplication if he must. We will grant he is the power over the seasons, and the tides, and the animal species, that the atom's electrons spin around it's nucleus at his will. But, they say, God has given up the single most important of all powers, the sovereignty over the part of creation he most delights in, namely the power to save a human soul he wants to save. He will not infringe on the freedom of the individual to love or not to love him back. And this is supposedly an honorable thing for which to sing praise! We praise him for being unwilling to insure the rescue of the prize portion of all his creating marvel; his children who happen to be drowning in the oceans of sin! To do that, we suppose, is a dishonor of man's right to choose for himself. (You may have noticed that this is the opposite of what Paul sing glory about in Romans 11:33-36!)

- If we accept the premise that God leaves the most important of all decisions to the most morally fallen of all creatures we have another problem of explaining away the biblical concept of election. Now what shall we do with all the talk of predestination, and election, and foreknowing in the Bible?

•*"[God] saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time," 2 Timothy 1:9, NIV.*

•*"All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No-one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"" Daniel 4:35, NIV.*

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•So Scripture asserts that God determines all things. However we think it better of God to not determine our salvation. And so, it is often calculated this way: God waits and watches, even into the future, for us to act, to do just the one thing right, that is: to believe. And then in response to that one self-generated act, he elects us, ie. he does not chose to save people, but that he only choses to respond positively to people who he knows in advance will chose him. But don't you see, this means we are not "chosen by divine grace" at all (11:5). We are chosen by a decisive human act to which God merely responds. We have determined his action ourselves. It all sounds quite honorable, but if it is true that we ultimately determine our own destiny, grace is no longer grace, but a reward for a work.

• This is our arrogant world. But Paul is not buying it, and neither does the rest of Scripture. And it is good for us to see this and build it into our worldview. And do you know why? The greater our appreciation for the sovereignty of God, the greater our astounded love for his grace and mercy freely given to us. Look at how Paul points to mercy!

•"For he says to Moses, "I will have **mercy** on whom I have **mercy**, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's **mercy**." Romans 9:15, 16, NIV.

•"Therefore God has **mercy** on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." Romans 9:18, NIV.

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•“What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his **mercy**, whom he prepared in advance for glory--” Romans 9:23, NIV.

•“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received **mercy** as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive **mercy** as a result of God’s **mercy** to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have **mercy** on them all.” Romans 11:30-32, NIV.

- And what is mercy? Is it not the withholding of punishment deserved? In other words, Paul is over and over reminding us that God is sovereign, and we are responsible moral agents who are not neutral, but already guilty and punishable by law!
- **3. God’s sovereignty calls for humility and awe-struck love!** You can hear the awe in Paul’s doxology, can’t you? It is not the mere having of an option that Paul praises. It is the mercy of a rightful ruler. Stand in awe people, of the God I am talking about to you! As one writer put it, “He knows all recorded facts—all the facts stored in all the computers and all the books in all the libraries in the world. But vastly more than that, he knows all events at the macro level—all that happens on earth and in the atmosphere and in all the farthest reaches of space in every galaxy and star and planet. And all events at the micro level—all that happens in molecules and atoms and electrons and protons and neutrons and quarks. He knows all their movements and every location and every condition of every particle of the universe at every nano-second of time. And he knows all events that happen in human minds and

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wills—all volitional and emotional and spiritual events—all thoughts and choices and feelings....That's what it means to be God." We don't add to his knowledge. We don't add to his wealth. Nor can we demand or even expect blessings from him. We are option-less. Paul quotes Job...

• *"Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me." Job 41:11, NIV.*

- Yes we tell people they must believe, and decide to love God. But it is ultimately God's love that saves people, not people's love for God. Our love and faith is the response. His love is the decisive cause! We are to be the child who finally realizes the state we had been in when we were dragged home kicking and screaming from the cult that brainwashed us into serving their leader by selling our body, or slaving in his mansion. After rescue by Jesus, who did not plead by the wall of the compound for us to run away with him, but came in like a commando, and forcibly recaptured us –after realizing all this, we are then utterly and passionately, even shudderingly in love with our rescuer! Who is also our real Dad.

- Would we love him more if he had succumbed to our choice to stay? Is that the better father, to honor my freedom, or to give me my life back though I didn't want it at the time?

- B. I said Gods sovereignty calls for humility. Part of humility is trust in the face of our own inability. Trust that God has a purpose. That God knows more than I do. That it is possible that

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what seems bad to me will in the end be good because of God.

In Genesis after Joseph's brothers had sold him to the Egypt, only to have him become their prince, they were afraid of his retribution. But what did he say?

• *"But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:19, 20, NIV.*

• In Jesus day, God allowed Israel to reject his son. They meant it for evil, but what did God mean it for?

• *"Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ... their transgression means riches for the world..."*

Romans 11:11, 12, NIV. Here sin/transgression actually led to salvation! It was no surprise to God, though it causes us to stop in awe!

• People often say, "If God is good why does he allow any evil at all?" The supposition is that since we cannot imagine any good out of it, there must not be one, and therefore God is not good. But suppose your toddler is leaning toward the burner on the stove, fascinated by it's glow. You have a few options. You can forever herd her away from the stove, never let her come within 6' of it's glow. But then you will always have to do that. Or suppose you let her touch it just slightly. Then you can be quite sure she will never want to do it again. Now she knows pain/evil, and hates pain/evil. One could argue that

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this is a better world than one in which there was no pain, and therefore no hatred of all that is evil.

• This is why Paul marvels at God and why you and I should too.

God has wisdom and knowledge that is richer and deeper than we can come up with (33).

• **Conclusion:** In the book of Job, Job experienced war, death, pain, suffering. He never knew why, but he did come to know God.

• *"Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:1-6, NIV.*

• This is what you and I need to say and do as well. Repent, and love God for his sovereignty and grace. Paul's doxology reminds us that we can never switch places with God. We don't bring God down to our level. We are in no position to bargain with God, or force God into anything by our behavior. And yet in his son Jesus he willingly came down to our level and switched places with us in the dock! He took our sins, knowing us by name with a plan that began before the formation of planets -not of obligation, but all out of love. Do you hear him calling you? Call back. Call on his name. Everyone who calls on his name will be saved. (10:9).