

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

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Number:	111		Gary L.W. Johnson
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Doxology (Part I)

We are following the traditional reading of the Lord's Prayer, which concludes with the words, "For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." The doxology is found in various forms in many manuscripts. The diversity of what parts are attested is itself suspicious; and the manuscript evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of omission. The doxology itself, of course, is theologically profound and contextually suitable and was no doubt judged especially suitable by those who saw in the last three petitions a veiled allusion to the Trinity; the Father's creation and providence provides our bread, the Son's atonement secures our forgiveness, and the Spirit's indwelling power assures our safety and triumph.¹ In other parts of Scripture, similar doxologies are to be found. One very closely analogous occurs in a prayer of David, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head over all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all" (I Chronicles 29:11, 12). As David used these words by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we need not wonder that David's Son and Lord, Who in all things sought, and commanded His followers to seek, the glory of His heavenly Father, should enjoin His disciples to employ similar language; and that the commencing and the concluding sentiment of the prayer should be alike. Besides, the disciples of Christ, in whom the Spirit of their Master dwelt, have introduced some parts, at least, of the same doxology, into their inspired writings. Paul did so very frequently. "Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen" (I Timothy 1:17). And again, "To whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (I Timothy 6:16). Jude has very closely imitated the same doxology in the last verse of his Epistle. "To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen" (Jude 25).² The Apostle Paul echoes the substance of this doxology with his own in Romans 11:33-36. This doxology underlines the leading principle of all divine truth, namely, the God Who is sovereign. In fact, there are few passages in the Word of God that declare as forcefully the conviction that God is all in human salvation, while man is only a helpless beneficiary of divine love and grace. This truth stands out in the four verses and confirms the appropriateness of the great titles given our Sovereign God, such as "the First and the Last," "the Beginning and the End," "the One Who Is, Who Was, and Is To Come," and "the Alpha and the Omega." The prophets and the apostles alike proclaim the blessed but humbling message, "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9).

I. THE PROFUNDITY AND INSCRUTABILITY OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE (vss. 33-35)

A. The Exclamation (v. 33)

The short paragraph begins with a striking exclamation, "Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!" The Apostle marvels at the course of the divine elective purpose as it is seen in the ages of salvation history. The three terms, "riches," "wisdom," and "knowledge" impress him. What do they connote?

1. *Riches*, PLOUTOU, is the broadest of them and refers to God's unlimited resources, and in this context, particularly His mercy (cf. v. 12; 2:4; 9:23; 10:12; II Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 2:4, etc.)
2. *Wisdom*, SOPHIAS, is mental excellence in its highest and fullest sense, one lexicographer has said, and perhaps we may add that it often represents the means employed in the use of knowledge. God's wisdom is the infinitely perfect use of His complete knowledge.
3. *Knowledge*, GNOSEOS, particularly as meant by the word used here in this context, refers to the infinite store of truth of all types in the mind of God. In this context especially it refers to the knowledge from which God's purposes come.

These terms modify the word *depth*, BATHOS.³ Is it necessary to note that Paul finds these qualities, infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and the infinite riches of mercy in God? Where else could they be found? The following line, "how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" heightens the picture. His "judgments" are the purposes of God, the determinations that flow from His infinite knowledge and wisdom, while His "ways" are His methods of procedure in accomplishing His intentions. The apostle states that His judgments are unsearchable, beyond the comprehension of man the creature, and that His ways are beyond the reach of the scientific method. The adjective, "past finding out," is derived from a Greek verbal adjective made up of the alpha privative "A" and the word "EXICHNIAZO," which means "to trace out by tracks."⁴

B. The Explanation (vss. 34-35)

The "for" of verse 34 introduces the explanation of this state of things. Infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and infinite riches of mercy necessarily lead to human astonishment. The words of the Scripture justify the statement of verse 33. Two quotations, the first from Isaiah 40:13 and the second from Job 41:11 (Hebrews 41:3), are cited to show that God's knowledge, wisdom, and riches of mercy are beyond human reach. The Scriptural texts are in the form of questions, and they support the preceding observations in reverse order. The opening line of verse 34, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" refers to the knowledge of God, the last of the astonishing infinities of the preceding verse. In the context of Isaiah 40:13, the prophet stands in the midst of the announcement of the coming redemption of the people by the exalted person of the Lord God (cf. vv. 1-11). The second line in verse 34, as in Isaiah's prophecy, has to do with wisdom. He needed no teacher or engineer in physical sciences to instruct Him in the science of creation. All the earth sciences repose in His mind in perfection. The carnal mind of man, often baffled by the divine words, tends to affirm that that which surpasses our reason is impossible, but we must remember that His incomparable power and mind are inscrutable. Let us submit our weakness, rashness, and occasional insolence to His unsearchable counsel in becoming humility. "All the reason or understanding that we have," Calvin reminds us, "is mere darkness, till we have been enlightened by Christ."⁵ The depth of His riches of mercy finds emphasis in verse 35 in the citation from Job 41:11 (Hebrews 41:3). No one has so given to Him that His benefits may be regarded as a requital for that giving. It is not that we first give to Him, and then He gives in response. All His gifts are in free grace and overflowing generosity. He, as Paul has said, "is rich unto all that call upon Him" (10:12). And they call upon Him, not to give Him something, but to receive what they cannot earn.

II. THE INDEPENDENT SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (vs. 36a)

A. The Source

The "for" (literally, "because") introduces the reason why man cannot lay God under obligation to Him. God Himself is the source, the mediator, and the goal of all things. How can He be anyone's debtor? He is the first cause of all, the agent Who works all in all, and all things have in

Him as their final cause (cf. I Corinthians 8:6; 12:6; Hebrews 2:10). The whole process of salvation, even including its negative aspects of disobedience, wrath, and retribution, is due to God's initiative, Who performs His purposes through the Son and the Spirit.⁶

B. The Mediator

The phrase, "through Him," marks out God as the mediator of all things and is inclusive of His providential ordering, care, and preservation of them.

C. The Goal

The entire redemptive purpose has as its goal the Lord God and the publication of His excellencies as the final clause indicates.

These three phrases, "of Him," "through Him," and "to Him" express most forcibly the independent sovereignty of God over this created universe, its intelligences, and creatures (cf. Daniel 2:21; 4:35). The gospel of sovereign grace, a doctrine pervading the Word of God, has always been the object of the world's contempt, for the world is a world of self-satisfied enemies of God, confident of self-justification. Nevertheless, the Scriptures extol the grace of a God Who sovereignly saves those who acknowledge their need and rest in a sovereign grace. My former professor of Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., summarizes, in a series of theological propositions, God's sovereign grace. "*First*, God loves in sovereign grace. Paul described the Thessalonians as 'brethren beloved of the Lord' (II Thessalonians 2:13). *Second*, He elects sinners in sovereign grace. Paul added that the Thessalonians were beloved, 'Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation' (II Thessalonians 2:13; I Thessalonians 1:4). *Third*, God calls in sovereign grace, making the unwilling willing, as the Apostle notes in Galatians 1:6, saying to the Galatians that God 'called you by the grace of Christ' (Galatians 1:6 NASB). *Fourth*, God justifies in sovereign grace. In one of his greatest passages, Paul writes that the Romans were 'justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus' (Romans 3:24). We could go on and on, but I will pass by His adopting and sanctifying grace to mention finally that God perseveres in sovereign grace, securing the eternal salvation of all His adopted family. Jesus said, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I will give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish' (John 10:27-28). All His sheep shall enjoy a safe arrival in the presence of the Lord."⁷

III. THE INEFFABLE GLORY OF GOD (36b)

A. Its Reference

It's no wonder, then, that the Apostle concludes on the note of the ineffable glory of God. All the events are "full of God," and that is not dry theological statement. It is a call to worship, and that Paul does with, "To Him be the glory forever. Amen." Gifford wrote, "As the rivers return again to the place whence they came, they all come from the sea, and they all run into the sea again: so all our store as it issued at first from the fountain of His grace, so should it fall at last into the ocean of His glory."⁸ Barrett puts it this way, "The *sola gratia* and *sola fide* of these eleven chapters can only issue in this *solī Deo gloria*. What it means to give glory to God, and how far removed this is from mere pious ejaculations, will appear in Romans, chapters 12-16."⁹

B. Its Essence

The essence of the glory of God may be defined as all the divine perfections in full display. This we see most fully and clearly in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, for God has given the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (cf. II Corinthians 4:6; I Corinthians 11:7; Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 5:13).

C. Its Endlessness

The endlessness of the manifested glory of God is a requirement of the endlessness of His eternal being. When time no longer exists as it does now, the manifestation of the excellencies of God's being shall be as fresh and striking as they were when we first came to know Him.

CONCLUSION: There is great confusion today over the meaning of sovereignty. Almost all Christians believe in the sovereignty of God, but few are able to define the term. This is not the place to settle the matter, but perhaps a few comments will clarify it. Sovereignty, a comprehensive term, includes three elements: supremacy, independence, and optional power. A sovereign is supreme in his dominions. A sovereign has the power of independent action in both external and internal relations. Finally, a sovereign has optional power, that is, the power to act or not act in a given instance. He has the power of free alternative action. The sovereignty of God, then, denotes God's supremacy, independence, and optional power in the kingdom of God. Ezekiel Hopkins, another of the great Puritan writers, makes a similar observation about the doxology in the Lord's Prayer. "In the Doxology, or Praise, there are four things contained: *First*, God's Sovereignty: *Thine is the kingdom*; *Secondly*, God's Omnipotency: *and the power*; *Thirdly*, God's Excellency; *and the glory*; *Fourthly*, The Eternity and Unchangeableness of them, and of all God's other attributes, noted to us in that expression *for ever*."¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ Cf. D.A. Carson, *Matthew: Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984), p. 174. However, Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Eerdmans, 1992], p. 149.) contends that the case of the doxology's inclusion is much stronger than many students assume, citing the noted German New Testament scholar J. Jeremias, who writes, "According to contemporary analogies, Jesus must have intended that the Our Father should conclude with a doxology, but would have left the user to fill it in for himself." (*Unknown Sayings of Jesus* [London, 1958], p. 28, n. 1.)

² Cf. H. Witsius, *The Lord's Prayer* (rpt. P&R, 1994), p. 375.

³ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker, 1998), p. 630.

⁴ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In the New Testament IV* (Broadman, 1931), p. 400.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary On the Book of the Prophet Isaiah III* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1948), p. 219.

⁶ C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Harper & Row, 1957), p. 229.

⁷ S.L. Johnson, *The Apostle Paul and the Purpose of the Ages* (Believers Chapel, Dallas, TX, 1979), p. 5. I am indebted to Dr. Johnson for the structure of the passage.

⁸ E.H. Gifford, *The Epistle of St. Paul To the Romans* (rpt. The James Family, 1977), p. 203.

⁹ Barrett, op. cit., p. 230.

¹⁰ *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins I* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), p. 58.