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Romans

For who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has become His counselor? Romans 11:34

Paul cites a verse from Isaiah 40. Taken with its surrounding verses, we get a glimpse at the "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." There Isaiah records the Lord's majesty to Israel -

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
Measured heaven with a span
And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?
Weighed the mountains in scales
And the hills in a balance?
Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,
Or as His counselor has taught Him?
With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him,
And taught Him in the path of justice?
Who taught Him knowledge,
And showed Him the way of understanding?" Isaiah 30:12-14

Unlike human rulers - kings, dictators, presidents, emperors, etc., the Lord needs no counselor, nor is there anything that He lacks in wisdom or knowledge. If someone were to attempt to advise the Lord, that attempt would be futile. All things were created by Him and so all knowledge to be discerned from within creation by a created being is already known to Him. His mind is infinitely higher

than the individual knowledge of man as well as the sum of the accumulated knowledge of man. In fact, if the storehouse of man's knowledge were to be maintained and updated for all eternity, it would still be infinitely less than the knowledge of the infinite Creator; a finite can never attain to the infinite.

Because of this, there is none who can advise God on what to do. Our prayers which attempt to "help God along" in His decision process are futile. And our prayers which attempt to "mandate" or "claim" something from God border on blasphemy. He sees the end, we don't. Therefore, to make a claim from God in essence assumes that the claim is in line with His future intentions; something we cannot know. If we claim prosperity or healing and God intended that we are to be poor or sick, then we have essentially usurped His divine will through our prayer.

And this avenue follows through with the subject matter of Romans 9-11. Whether we agree with Israel's return; whether we accept God's mercy upon Israel or not; and whether we like or don't like the people of Israel - none of that matters. God has shown us in His word the state of the nation, the extent of His mercy, and the love He has for His disobedient people. For us to work against these things, or to pray against them, is only a sign of our own rebellion against Him. God is working out an immensely detailed and marvelous plan. Let us be found in accord with it, not striving against it!

Life application: In your prayers, don't "advise" God on what He should do. And, in your prayers, don't "mandate" to God what is right. Rather, petition the Lord for that which You desire and be ready to accept His answer - be it yes or be it no. He is God; the answer belongs to Him alone.

**"Or who has first given to Him
And it shall be repaid to him?" Romans 11:35**

Here we have Paul's final Old Testament quote of chapter 11. He reaches back to Job and the Lord's words there -

"Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him?
Everything under heaven is Mine." Job 41:11

The question that the Lord is asking of Job is "Who has paid me first (preceded Me), that I should (re)pay him?"

Paul uses this quote as if he is asking each of us in order to consider it. The answer is obvious. God is the Creator and thus the Source of all things. There is nothing that we possessed before He possessed it and therefore, there is nothing that isn't His. And this isn't only speaking of tangible things like gold and silver, but of all things that come from the material creation and which are found in man - grace, mercy, love, devotion, etc.

When God constructed us, He did so in a way which allows us to participate in His creation in a cognitive way. We have understanding and reason, we have emotions and desires, etc. But all of these came from the same Source. This is why John can state, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We can't even claim that our love preceded His. He is eternal in nature and love is one of His many attributes. Therefore, His love is. It doesn't increase or decrease. He is love and this love has always been. We have been the object of His love in His eternal mind before creation itself stood firm.

No matter what we offer to Him, it came as a result of His creative effort and therefore there is nothing which needs to be repaid by Him. From this spoken word to Job, the Lord follows with the statement, "Everything under heaven is mine." He is God; the Source and Possessor of all things.

Life application: At times, we may feel we've done something great for the Lord. And from a human perspective it may be so. But our deeds can never precede the Lord and therefore we are owed nothing. This shows us the immense grace of the judgment seat of Christ where "rewards" will be handed out for our faithful acts (see 1 Corinthians 3:9-15). Despite not owing us a thing, He still has reserved rewards for our faithfulness. What a great God!

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36

Three Greek prepositions are used in this last verse of Romans 11 - ek, dia, and eis - "of," "through," and "to." It is an all-encompassing statement concerning God, His creation, and all that creation holds. It is God, not a "big bang," which created the universe. In fact, a big-bang is a logical contradiction. For the universe to "bang" into existence means that it would have to have existed before it existed because nothing cannot create something. The universe is not a self-existent entity, and therefore if there was nothing, there would still be - for all eternity - nothing.

But there is a self-existent God who is the Source of all things. And despite the constant assault against Him and against His authority, He owes nothing to man. Though we argue against His goodness, claim that we deserve His favor, and act as if He isn't even there until we get into a bad patch, none of our actions changes His sovereign rule.

"For of Him" indicates that He is the Creator and the Source of everything. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." If there was a beginning, and there was (thanking Einstein for demonstrating this), then there must have been a beginner. For of Him are all things.

For "through Him" indicates that God is the Sustainer of all things. He is the unseen agency of our continued existence. "And *he* is before all, and all things subsist together by him" Colossians 1:17 (Darby). He is the One who holds all things together. But even more, He is the One who allows all things to continue from moment to moment. This is why Jesus, speaking to the leaders of Israel, was able to make this statement -

"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.'" John 5:17

God's creative effort ended on the sixth day, but His sustaining effort does (and must) continue on without ceasing. Without this continued sustaining power, all things would simply cease to exist. For through Him are all things.

For "to Him" shows that He is the end-purpose and goal of all things. He is the final and ultimate reason of every created thing. As the Source and Sustainer, this can be the only logical conclusion. Because He created time, He is therefore outside of time - eternally before and after. All things find their conclusion in Him. And, amazingly, because he participated in His creation by entering the stream of humanity, all things are directed toward their completion in the Person of Jesus. Hebrews 1:2, speaking of Christ Jesus, says that He is "appointed heir of all things." Christ is the recipient of all power, rule, and authority; a state which will exist as long as God exists, which is eternally. For to Him are all things.

"To Him be glory forever" can be analyzed and spoken of until words run out and yet there will be more to say. The praises shall never end, the marvel shall never cease, the awe at beholding the incomprehensible greatness of God will never get old. From Him flows an eternal stream of delight and majesty. In the new heavens and the new earth, we shall behold this with our eyes and the praises of God will know no end. And it was all made possible by His own wisdom and splendor, displayed in the most amazing way of all -

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:15-20

Life application: If you are planning on boasting, do so in the cross of Jesus Christ.