



Part 1 – The Gift and Challenge of God's Ownership

Romans 11:33-36

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

Paul's epistle to the Romans is the most complete single explanation of the gospel in the Bible. By the time we reach the end of chapter 11 we have read about the comprehensive nature and consequences of sin, the gospel

as the vindication of God's righteousness, the imputation of Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, God's sovereign election, the necessity to respond in faith, and sanctification. After writing such a wealth of glorious doctrine Paul ends chapter 11 with a doxology (vv. 33-36):

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.

*"For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?"*

*"Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?"*

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Paul begins his doxology with an acknowledgement of God's fundamental "otherness." That is, God is not like us to the extent that he is "inscrutable," which means that he is beyond our understanding. Whatever we know about God we know because he has chosen to reveal it to us in his works and his word. Paul then asks three rhetorical questions: *Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor? and Who has given him a gift that he might be repaid?* These questions are meant, at least in part, to establish God's radical independence. He is never in need of his creation. He does not exist in a give-and-take relationship with anything in creation.

What follows, then, is a three-fold statement concerning the nature of God's ownership of all things. God's ownership can be understood as a cycle wherein all things come **from** God, are sustained **through** God, and will be returned **to** God. In this one doxological statement we are given a window into the purpose of all things. Nothing in all creation is excluded from this flow of Divine ownership.

It is clear from Paul's description, that God's ownership is dynamic rather than static. That is, there is movement to the way in which God owns which separates his kind of ownership from that which we see in the rest of creation. Remember, in verses 33-35 Paul has already established the otherness of God. This otherness is seen not only in God's essence but in his acts, including his acts of ownership. The ownership of God over all things in creation is a life-giving movement out of which all things are from, through, and, ultimately, to Him.

Main Idea: God's way of ownership is expressed by a dynamic process of generous giving which both challenges and comforts us.

1. From Him

- God is *the* great Giver. Everything we have comes from his generous hand. He withholds nothing from his children that they truly need. Supremely, the Father gave the Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in his should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).*

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:28-30)

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (Acts 17:24-25)

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

- Since all things in heaven and on earth belong to the Lord then we must evaluate our thoughts about ownership in light of this truth. We must think of ourselves, not as owners, but as stewards of that which belongs to God. A steward's central goal is to be found faithful by the master. This was a recurring theme in Jesus' teaching.

2. Through Him

- To say that all things are "through" God means that he upholds everything in every way. Every detail of creation is tended to the Creator. Every electron revolving around every nucleus of every atom is held in place by God. What a contrast this is with our own tendency to either neglect or forget about the things in our care. This constant care and upholding of all things is what we mean when we speak of God's providence.
"And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17).
"...And he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3).
- This is comforting truth for we are part of the "all things" which are "through him." To be God's own possession means that we will be sustained according to his own wise providence. To be "through him" means that we are loved and cared for with God's own perfect wisdom. Jesus taught us that God's care for sparrows and lilies is all the proof we need that he will care for us (**Matt. 6:25-33**).

3. To Him

Vs. 36 – "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

- That God is the owner of all things certainly implies a confrontation with our own assumptions concerning ownership. Our money, our family and friends, our time, our reputation, and our very lives are not our own but belong to God. This knowledge must inform how we think about and use our lives and resources. The prophet Zechariah foretold a day when all things will be inscribed with the words "Holy to the LORD" (**Zech. 14:20-21**). This life is the training grounds for that coming day.
- It also true that God's universal ownership is a blessed gift which actually serves to maximize our joy. Indeed, God's ownership of our lives and resources enrich us. Though we may not initially recognize it, the final clause of verse 36 assures of this – "To him be glory forever. Amen." There is nothing more enriching to the lives of God's people than God himself.
- Understanding God's ownership is not ultimately about fundraising efforts. The knowledge of God's ownership of all things is intended to draw us into worship and devotion. It is only by acknowledging that all things are from, through, and to God that we understand ourselves properly. So long as we seek to hold some measure of ownership over our lives we will have a disordered relationship with the Lord. If we seek to establish that the things in our lives are "to" us then we will have a fundamental misunderstanding of ourselves and our role in this brief life.
- The Gospel teaches us to gladly embrace the comprehensive ownership of all things. The gospel reminds us that since God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (**Rom. 8:32**). The purchase price for our salvation was the Father's own Son. How then can we imagine that God would withhold from us anything that is for our good?