

Sermon Draft

Text: Romans 11:33–36

Sermon: “To God Alone Be Glory!”

I like to say God has a sense of humor. Here we are, mortal human beings trying to get a handle on God, the Creator of all things! Surely it must bring God a bit of a chuckle to watch our intellectual gymnastics and the mortal, fallible, and sinful attempts to discern the unlimited, the unchangeable, and the all-powerful. At the same time, it pleases God when his people engage in the struggle to know him.

In this life, understanding God will never be fully accomplished. Theologians spend lifetimes studying just a few aspects of God’s attributes or character, only to discover that full understanding cannot be obtained. Yet come the divine exhortations to learn and grow in our faith. Here, too, we make another surprising discovery. The more we study and hear the Word of God, the greater our hunger grows for more. In this Epistle reading St. Paul marvels over it all. He is overwhelmed by the wisdom and knowledge of God, especially with respect to how that wisdom is displayed in his Son, Jesus Christ.

The world glorifies itself with its own wisdom (v 33). Unbelieving minds believe they know the mind of God, but they don't. In human arrogance, we pronounce our own opinions about who God is and what he is like.

In the April 21, 2000, issue of the *Wall Street Journal* an article entitled "Redefining God" appeared. The tenor of the article was that in postmodern America, traditional views of God were no longer acceptable and to make God more "relevant" people and some denominations were taking it upon themselves to define the Almighty according to their own desires. I fear that such an article only reflects a generally held view that if there are some traits about God that make us uncomfortable, we may simply choose not to believe in them. Get the picture? The puny creature gets to decide who his Creator is and on what basis he will relate to him.

Postmodern humanity wants to set the rules by which God can govern his own creation. Time and again, many are willingly fooled into thinking that our perceptions can create reality. In other words, if we believe it to be so, then it is.

I have often seen such a philosophy depicted on bumper stickers when I read the well-intended, but misguided, slogan “Visualize World Peace.” Now, of course, all of us want world peace, but it won’t happen by simply perceiving it to be true. Personally, my favorite bumper sticker that parodies the world peace one is “Visualize Turn-Signal Usage.”

Unbelieving minds believe they can pay God back for sins committed, but they can’t (v 35). Plan after doomed plan propose to “get right with God” through self-improvement. Islam demands that the five pillars of the faith be completed. Buddhists insist on following the eightfold path of enlightenment. Mormons stress being worthy enough to please God. Ethical humanists want us all to work hard so we can create our own heaven here on earth. Such ideas only feed that which God despises above all other things—self-righteousness!

To offer our imperfection to a holy and perfect God is like presenting a meal of wonderfully prepared meat to an honored guest, but the meat is spoiled.

It is an insult to God's person that anything less than perfect can be offered to him in payment for sin when his Son has already provided the perfect payment for our sins on the cross.

We cannot offer payment of any kind for a debt that has already been fully paid! What manner of imperfect living could be traded for the life of Jesus the Christ? What offering of human performance will be acceptable to God when it is his Son who has already done all things well? It is no wonder that Jesus saves his harshest words for any who would attempt to make payment for their sins (Matthew 23:27–28).

God is glorified by his Son, who is the very wisdom of the Father. It is time to cease our endless speculations about God and stand in wonder at the reality of his wisdom revealed to us in the Scriptures. We cannot find truth from within ourselves, but we can know the wisdom that comes from above (2 Peter 1:19–21). Why settle for the conjectures of men when we may receive the utter wisdom of God?

Our acceptance of human conjectures over the revealed Word of God is a bit like being given a choice between a fine lobster dinner at a five-star restaurant or partaking in fare retrieved from the dumpster behind a fast-food restaurant. Yet many opt for the garbage—amazing! All of God’s wisdom is perfect, but the greatest expression of divine wisdom is Jesus Christ. In Christ we see the amazing wisdom of God more clearly than any other way.

In Jesus Christ we see the singular and perfect solution for the rendering of God’s perfect justice. In the life of Christ there was not a single misstep, not a single flaw. He was perfect in every way (2 Corinthians 5:21). Perfection became sin on behalf of sinners, and the Father’s divine justice was fully satisfied. Oh, the wisdom of God that divinity itself should receive humanity’s punishment! The wisdom of God is the seeming defeat of the cross, which becomes the tree of life for the world. What human mind would have considered that a criminal’s death on a Roman cross of execution would be the means by which humankind’s salvation would be won?

Never in the history of the world has the Father displayed his love for humankind more fully than on Calvary's painful cross!

It is God's amazing wisdom that we should come to know of this divine love by means of 12 seemingly unremarkable men whom God has made remarkable. Through the apostolic Scriptures we have seen the wisdom that comes from above. Through the instrumentation of fallible people in fallible congregations led by fallible pastors, the Word of Life is proclaimed to you!

And what is the end result of God's divine wisdom revealed to us from above? God receives all the glory so richly due him. Johann Sebastian Bach, the great Lutheran composer of the eighteenth century, always wrote at the end of each of his many compositions the following: *Soli Deo Gloria*—To God Alone the Glory. As far as Bach was concerned, anything he wrote was precisely for the purpose of glorifying God alone. What a wonderful way to live our lives as people living under God's grace. I pray that at the end of every good work, which Christ establishes in our lives, we may write our *Soli Deo Gloria*.

At the end of every single day our song to honor God's gracious wisdom in Christ will be written, *Soli Deo Gloria*. And I pray that when our loved ones stand at the foot of our grave, the inscription on our tombstone is *Soli Deo Gloria*. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! To him be the glory forever! Amen."