

Romans 11 Doxology

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0:00] There's a young man in his late teens, early twenties, he'd been away at university, came back to his home church, and on his way out, his minister was standing at the door, he said, I've got to be honest minister, worship didn't do it for me this morning.

And the minister replied, it wasn't for you, son. It wasn't for you, son. It didn't do it for me this morning. It wasn't for you, son.

And I think that preacher, John Sartell, puts his finger on something when we think about what we're doing this morning. We tend to put ourselves at the front of the line. We think, did this connect with me? Did I like the songs? Do I like the prayers? Was I paying attention?

Did the sermon interest me? Or was I checked out during the Lord's Supper? Were my children zoned out? Yes, we are the participants in it. But it wasn't for us. It isn't for us. Worship is something that we are giving to God and to him.

It doesn't help God. Our worship doesn't improve God's life. Our worship is a response. It is an offering to him.

[1:31] And the book of Romans helps us with this. We shouldn't put one book of the Bible over any other book of the Bible. But in the Christian church, in the history of the Christian church, Romans has been incredibly important.

It tends to be the case, when the church gets back into Romans, things happen. And not just at a communal level, at a heart level. I try to work out that I preach on Romans, preach to Romans about every four to five years.

I don't do that with any other book of the Bible. Because in the history of the Christian church, when we get into Romans, what Romans does is it diagnoses us. Romans, as a book, shows you what's wrong with you.

It celebrates what God is able to do in you. And it anticipates what is ahead for you. Romans shows us what our lives would look like if God transformed our ethic.

And Romans is not ultimately about us. It is the gospel of God. And this text shows us that. It puts us under that light.

[2:43] Where we read to comes at the end of the first section of Romans. And so the end of Romans 11 is a transition point. It moves from the teachy part, if I can put it like that.

The doctrinal part. To the applicatory part. That's really simplistic. But the end of Romans 11 functions as a bridge. And you'll notice that the end of Romans 11 is a doxology.

We're looking at some doxologies, remember. Doxology is different from a benediction. A benediction is a good word. That's what the word literally means. From God.

When we pronounce the benediction at the end of the service. You are receiving from the risen Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father. His blessing. But doxology is when we praise God.

When we speak to God. It's when the people of God pronounce a blessing on him. We don't help God. And we don't improve God.

[3:44] God is not needy. But we praise him as a response to who he is and what he's done. And Paul prays at the end of Romans 11 this bridge.

And then he gives us this doxology. What's been happening in Romans is that there has been all this doctrine. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The good news.

And then he gets into the mystery. Of God's great plan. That God has designed his redemption to bring in people like you and I Gentiles.

And the Israelites who have had all the privileges of the gospel and the covenant. He has hardened through their unbelief.

And yet God is not finished with the people of Israel. And Romans is written to a mixed church with both Jews and Gentiles. To a diverse church.

[4:44] And he says there is one people of God. There is one way of salvation. There is one saviour. There is one plan. One redemption. One people. And as he reflects on this.

Doxology bubbles up out of him. And my prayer is that if you are here this morning. And you're on autopilot. Then you would realise this morning. It is not about you.

It is about him. Look at Romans 11 verses 33 to 36. Where Paul exclaims. Oh the depths of the riches. And wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgment. How inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord. Who has been his counsellor. Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid.

And here is the doxology. For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Amen. Maybe you are here this morning and you hear things like it's all about him.

[5:49] It's all about God. And you say, not out loud, but you say to yourself, I'm not sure. You might say to yourself, I don't know whether I want that to be my life. I don't want to get to the stage where I recognise that he is God and I am not.

And my prayer is that we look at this this morning. That he would turn our hearts to him. Not so that he wins and you lose. And not so that God wrenches your arm behind your back and says, well, I'm God and you're not.

But you would see what your soul really wants. We're going to let the text set the structure of the sermon. So verse 36, three points. All things are from God.

All things are through God. All things are to God. From him, through him, to him. What Paul is saying, essentially, is this.

The universe, all things, whether they are known or unknown, whether they are visible or invisible, whether they are far or near, whether they are personal or impersonal, all things are from him.

[6:58] And so we are thinking of God as the creator. All things are from him. Now I could pile on here, couldn't I, and just list all the things, all the planets, all the stars, all the asteroids, all the quasars, all the outer space things that you could think of.

And I don't think that will touch you deeply, but it would be true. All of that, all of this universe is from him. But I want you to think this morning of us as creatures.

I think when we hear the word creatures, we think of creepy crawlies, don't we? We think of little creatures in the woods. And yes, though, they are creatures.

But if you want to see a creature, just hold out your hand, look at it. And look at it. Look at your feet. You are a creature. You might not believe in God, but you did not make yourself.

We did not make ourselves. We are body and soul creatures. We are both. We are bodies. Often the way that we think of life, I think the way that we think of ourselves is we think we're just bodies.

[8:16] And so if I'm feeling low, or if I'm feeling down, you might think, well, I need a hit of something. I need some dopamine. I might go to try and get some serotonin. I need something chemical.

I need something immaterial to affect my mood, to affect my body. But we are body and soul. If we die before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, if we die before the Lord Jesus comes again, there will be a time when we are souls without our bodies.

Let me read to you the shorter catechism, which says this. What do benefits, what benefits do believers receive from Christ at death? So let's say you're trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and you die this morning.

What happens? The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory. They are with Christ. And their bodies, still being united to Christ, do rest in the graves till the resurrection.

There is a separation. There is a time, if we die before the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, we are souls without our bodies.

[9:25] But we can't be bodies without our souls. Our bodies will rest after our death if we die in him. We will fall asleep in him. But we are souls that are embodied.

So think about your bodies for a minute. And think about your organs. And your organs are from God. All the systems of your body are from God.

The involuntary things that your body does is from God. You don't have to think this morning about keeping your heart beating, do you?

It's really important that your heart keeps beating. But you don't have to come up with a strategy to keep breathing. You don't have to come up with a strategy to keep breathing while you're asleep. You just do that involuntary. Because that is from him. Even my particular shape. And I know there are decisions that we can make, can't there? That can affect our shape.

[10:25] But I mean the fundamental shape of who we are. So I am never going to be six foot five. I'm never going to be five foot one. That is from God. And your shape, the body that you have, is from God.

And our souls are from God. Often we talk about being image bearers. I often say that. But the Bible is a bit more direct than that. It says you are God's image.

It's not just that you bear it. You are God's image. You are his image, body and soul. In our souls we can do things that other creatures cannot do.

Or at least not to the degree that we can do it. We can reason. We have some people in our congregation who are bright.

Intellectually very bright. We have some people who did astonishingly well in their GCSEs this week. And that is from God. The ability to reason.

[11:32] The ability to will. The ability to do something. The ability to execute. The ability to implement is from him. Some of you in this room have a great work ethic. You're a hard worker.

Some of you in this room can be really decisive in business. You can pull the trigger when other people can't. You can execute plans. And it can feel like it's from me.

But it is from God. To have a will that is even capable of a work ethic. To be able to make decisions. To have reason. To have a will.

To have emotions. We mirror God. It's quite a bit of research out there isn't there. About the human need for awe. Human beings need to encounter something.

You know that. It was the start of the football season yesterday. You saw. Hundreds of thousands of people going to worship. That need for something greater. That need for awe.

[12:33] That would get us over the grind. And the norms of life. We know that there is something bigger. Innately. Something more mysterious. That makes life worth living. And that ability to experience awe.

Is from God. Now I could go on and on and on about this. How is it from God? One of the speakers at the Catalyst Conference.

One of the speakers at the Theology Conference we had in the summer. Was a guy called Kelly Capic. He's a theological teacher in America. And he wrote a book called You're Only Human.

And he makes lots of great points in that book. But the biggest point he makes in that book. Is when Christians talk about humility. And the need for humility. And that humility is a good thing.

We almost always ground humility in badness. And so you know and I know this morning. That we are capable of sin. We're capable of hurting other people.

[13:33] And we hurt ourselves. We do evil things. We think terrible things. And because we are capable of that. And sometimes we do those things. We should be humble.

And that is true. But Kelly Capic makes this great point. Before human beings ever sinned. They should still be humble. Because we are creatures.

We depend upon God for everything. And so if there was no sin in the world at all. We would still need God for everything.

If there was no sin in the world. We would still need to be humble. Because we need God for everything. Because everything is from him.

All things are from God. And all things secondly are through God. So if all things are from God. Which makes us think about creation.

[14:35] All things are through God. Which makes us think about what theologians call providence. That is God is working all things out according to his purpose and his plan. Think for a moment of the story of Joseph in the Bible.

With all the twists and the turns. All the being sold into slavery. And then climbing the greasy pole. And then sliding down the snake into prison.

And then being raised to a position of honour and authority and deliverance. And he looks back at his long life. And he says God has been in it all. What you meant for evil. God meant for good. God has a plan.

And he's working it out. And providence is not just a term for God making the world. God didn't make the world like we think of a wind up watch. Like this watch. That I wind it up on a Sunday morning.

And I wear it on a Sunday. And I let it wind down. And then I get to the next Sunday. And I wind it up. But I don't play any role in it week by week. God doesn't say I made the world now you run with it.

[15 : 38] God makes everything. And he rules everything. And he directs everything. And he orchestrates everything. And there's great tension for us here. Because we hear that and we think we'll slow down a minute.

What about the Holocaust? What about genocide? What about this terrible crash in Middlesbrough? What about my awful circumstances? And we could go on and on and on and on couldn't we? But you need to understand that Scripture holds to affirmations and denials. In the Bible it's really clear that it affirms that God decrees whatever comes to pass.

God's personal hand is on everything. But Scripture is also clear that it denies that God is the author of sin and evil. It denies that God would even tempt someone to sin.

So there's affirmation and there's denial. And part of living as a Christian is living in that tension. Let me get more personal about this.

[16 : 44] If everything in life is through God, that means everything that I experience can be an on-ramp to experiencing God.

Everything I experience can be used so that I experience God. Let me show you this.

It's interesting to see how Paul shows us that in his missionary journeys. Paul speaks in different ways about the gospel to different people. When he talks to a Jewish audience, when he's in a synagogue, he speaks differently to them than he does to pagans.

So when he's speaking to people who didn't grow up in synagogues and they don't know the law, they don't know Joseph, they don't know Moses, they don't know the prophets, he does not quote the law and the prophets to them. He eases in and he begins with God.

And when Paul is in Athens, Greece, and he's talking there to the intellectuals and there's an exchange and debate and cut and thrust, Paul quotes Greek writers.

[17 : 48] He quotes to them one of their Greek authors, to a Greek audience. It's actually attributed to Zeus. And Paul says, one of your own poets, one of your own writers said, in him we live and move and have our being.

Paul says, you know that concept that you've got in Greek philosophy, it's actually true. Think about those words. In God, we live and move and have our being. And so if everything is from God, in him we live, in him we have our being, and it doesn't come from me, but it says, in him we move.

It's not just that he created me and I've got legs, and a brain and a nervous system and muscles. In him I move. And it's not just a decision to run. In him I run.

And that means a lot of things. It means that God is not just the author of our existence. God is the author of our story. People in our culture are so consumed with their own stories. Let me tell you my story.

Let me let you in on my story. You've got to know my story to understand me. When I tell you my story, it deserves attention. But God is not just the author of my hands and my feet and my soul and my reason.

[19 : 03] God is the author of your story. And your story is to direct you to him. Let me give you another example. Paul is speaking to a group of pagans in Acts 14.

They don't believe in the Lord Jesus. It's a group that didn't grow up with the Bible. They didn't go to a holiday Bible club. But he wants them to know the one true God. And he knows that they were made by this God.

And that they have a body and they have a soul made by God. And so listen to how he engages with them. He goes with his friend Barnabas. They do a miracle. And the people are so astonished at who he is and what he's done that they begin to worship Paul and Barnabas.

And Paul says, Men, why are you doing these things? We are men like you. But we bring you good news that you should turn from these things, these vain things, to a living God who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

In past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. And now listen to this. Yet he did not leave himself without a witness. For he did good by giving you rain from heaven and

fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

[20 : 18] Think about what Paul just did. He didn't quote John 3.16. He didn't draw them a diagram. He didn't tell them, Jesus died for your sins.

He didn't do that. He didn't quote the law. He didn't quote the prophets. But here is what he says. He says, The God I want to tell you made the world and made you. And he made the land and he made the sea.

But he goes further than that. He says, Did you enjoy a glass of wine last night? Because the God I'm here to tell you about? He didn't just create the grapes. And he didn't just create the vineyard. He says, You see the vintage of the bottle of wine that you drank last night? God made that. God. The God who I'm telling you about is the God in whom you live and move and have your being. God was working in your midst, providing for you, giving you joy, even though you didn't know him. And he did that so that you would come to know him.

[21 : 28] So the providence of God can be an on-ramp back to him. In other words, you might be here this morning, bizarrely, and you might not be interested in the Bible.

You might not be interested in a Bible study or a Christian book. But you need to realise this. What has happened to you? Your family background, your struggles, your setbacks, all of that is ordered by him.

And it has happened through him. And finally, all things are to God. All things are from him.

All things are through him. And all things are to him. C.S. Lewis wrote, In the Weight of Glory, it's a glorious sermon, essay.

And C.S. Lewis is talking about when you bump into something that you really love and you really like it. Maybe it was a book that you read. Maybe it was a play that you went to watch. Maybe it was music.

[22 : 35] Maybe it was a humour. Maybe it was an experience. And you're with these people and you think, this is it. I just wish I could bottle this and it could stay forever. This is what C.S. Lewis wrote.

He said this, The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them. It was not in them. It only came through them.

And what came through them was longing. These things, the beauty, the memory of our own past, are good images of what we really desire. But if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers.

For they are not the thing itself. They are only the scent of a flower we've not found, the echo of a tune we've not heard, news from a country we've not visited. Think of the biggest joy you've had this week.

Think of the biggest joy you've had in the last six months. Let me tell you what that was. It was the scent of a flower you've not found. It was the echo of a tune you've not heard.

[23 : 41] It is news from a country you've not yet visited, according to C.S. Lewis. Now that experience, whatever it is, is going to be different for everyone in this room. Maybe experience of sport, or music, or the meal, or the trip.

But whatever it is, that achievement, that experience, that career, the trick is this. We find that thing, and we think, that is it.

That's the thing. I'm going to live for that experience, for that sport, for that person, for that job. And Lewis says, if you do that, you will turn it into an idol, and it will break your heart.

And what you've got to understand, is that something was coming through that thing, and your heart actually wants what's behind it.

The longing is for what is behind that experience. And what is behind that experience is God. The longing is for him.

[24 : 47] And here's the amazing thing, Paul says in one of his letters. The culmination of human history, when everything is finally wrapped up, when all things in the universe, are presented to Jesus Christ, to the risen Christ, and are subjected to him, then Paul says, Jesus will take all things, and he'll subject them to his father.

The culmination of all human history, is that all things, are to him. And I can imagine, that you may be listening to this this morning, and you think, well I actually quite like the bigness of this.

I like that it provides a big story to my life. But I am me. And I can't see God. Okay, all things are from God, and all things are through God, and to God.

Good for him. What about me? What about me? I work really hard. And there are things that I have achieved, and they are from me, and through me, and to me.

But actually the word of God, won't let us think like that. There are things though, this morning, that are from you, and through you. Turns out there are things.

[26 : 03] Envy. Envy each other, coveting each other's possessions. Looking around in this room, and thinking, you have what I should have. You shouldn't have the kind of marriage that you have.

I should have that. You shouldn't have that much money. I should have that. You shouldn't have that house. I should have that. That's from us. And through us. And we not only have the origin, but we execute coveting, don't we?

And envying. Our apathy towards the vulnerable, and the poor, the alien, the widow. The fatherless. Our apathy, the Bible says, that's a massive thing.

Those things that we are often apathetic about, they are near to the heart of God. The wounding and hurting people with our words, that's from us.

There are people in this room out there, and their lives have been changed, by words that were wielded against them, maybe when they were children, or when they were teenagers. And they still reel from them, when they think about it.

[27 : 12] And the ability to do that is from us. And the executing of doing it is through us. Here's the bad news. Romans is really clear on this. Paul begins with his big weighty letter.

He says all those things, all our envy, all our coveting, all our wounding each other, all our apathy, all our lovelessness, all our rage, all our lust, it's from us and through us. And there will come a day when it is to us.

When what is from us and through us will be credited to us. When God will give us its due. of what he thinks of it.

That it is from you and through you. And unto you will be those decisions. Unto you will be that disposition of heart. That God will say, let it receive what it justly deserves.

The bad news is this, God is fair. And God is present. And God watches his world so closely that he wants every dark thing to be to the owner.

[28 : 17] Because that would be just, there is the bad news for everyone in this room. But here is the good news. It's the good news that is so beautifully unpacked in the letter to the Romans.

It's the good news of the whole Bible. It is that there is a good news from God. And the good news from God is through God. And it is from God when there was no compulsion for him to save.

And so rather than that sin and that lust and that darkness and that coveting and that apathy about the vulnerable or the rage and the hurt rather than that be to you, God says in the gospel, let it be to another.

Let it be to my son. Let it all be credited to him even though all of it is from you and through you.

Let it be to another. Let my son receive its due. And so from God who is not obligated to do this comes good news and it's not just from him but it is through him because God the Father sends his son.

[29 : 25] Don't ever think that the Old Testament God reluctantly let Jesus come and die for sinner and just regrets it as if he wished he could send some thermal nuclear strike.

That's what he really would love to do. But Jesus twisted his arm. No, God so loved the world that he gave. God so loved the world that he gave. The Father sends the son and God the son accomplishes receiving the judgment that we deserve giving us his righteousness and he ascends into heaven and he sends down his Holy Spirit to be with you this morning.

Because you cannot fix yourself and you cannot satisfy yourself and you cannot cleanse yourself and you cannot actually rule yourself. And so turn to him.

And God the Spirit says to you this morning turn to God the Son. Be reconciled to God the Father. All the sin is from us and through us.

All the good news is from him and through him and to him. And so we are the great beneficiaries. So let me wrap up. You have a soul a soul that God has made a soul that has to look at something whatever it is and say to you be glory forever and ever.

[30 : 49] And so what is it that you are saying that to? You have got to find the thing and I have got to find the thing to which I will say to you be glory forever and ever. And all of my life is orientated towards you now.

