

“His Ways Past Tracing Out”

Romans 11:33

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**ASV**

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**KJV**

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*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

Like a traveller who has reached the summit of an Alpine ascent, the apostle turns and contemplates. Depths are at his feet; but waves of light illumine them, and then spreads all around an immense horizon which his eye commands. The plan of God in the government of mankind spreads out before him, and he expresses the feeling of admiration and gratitude with which the prospect fills his heart. (*Prof. Godet*.)

**The depth of the divine wisdom**

As a man wading into the sea, when he comes up to the neck and feels the water begin to heave him up and his feet to fail him, cries out, “O the depth!” and goes back, so it fares with Paul in this place, and it is as if he should have said thus: “O you Romans and my countrymen the Jews, I have writ unto you these things as far as I can; for the rest I am swallowed up, being more unable to pass farther into this bottomless, than to wade through the depth of the sea. Cease, therefore, to put more questions, and admire with me the depth of the wisdom of God.” (*Elnathan Parr, B.D*.)

**The wisdom and knowledge of God**

The true distinction between knowledge and wisdom is indicated by Theodoret. “He foreknew these things from the beginning, and, having foreknown them, He arranged them wisely.” Bishop Lightfoot says, “While *gnosis* is simply intuitive, *sophia* is ratiocinative also. While ‘gnosis’ applies chiefly to the apprehension of truths, ‘sophia’ superadds the power of reasoning about them and tracing their relations.” To complete the distinction, we must add that, while knowledge is theoretical, wisdom is practical; and while knowledge is purely intellectual, wisdom is also moral; and for that reason is both the most perfect of mental gifts (Aristotle, “Nic. Eth.” 6.10) and the queen of all the virtues (Cicero, “De Off.” 1.43). In the present context, “gnosis” seems to refer especially to God’s foreknowledge of the free determinations of man’s will, both in individuals and nations; while “sophia” denotes the admirable skill with which He includes man’s free actions in His plan, and transforms them into so many means for the accomplishment of His good purpose. (*Archdeacon Gifford*.)

**The depths of the Godhead**

**I.** How they stand revealed before us in His—

**1.** Nature.

**2.** Works.

**3.** Ways.

**II.** How we stand overwhelmed before them in—

**1.** Humility.

**2.** Faith.

**3.** Hope. (*J. Lyth, D.D*.)

**The depth and wealth of Divine grace**

**I.** Wisdom conceived the purpose.

**II.** Knowledge devised the plan.

**III.** Judgments prepare the way.

**IV.** Grace achieves the result. (*J. Lyth, D. D.*)

**The unfathomable depth of redeeming love**

**I.** Wisdom in the plan.

**1.** In the gift of His Son.

**2.** In the communication of His righteousness.

**3.** In the glory of the issue.

**II.** Mystery is the procedure.

**1.** With the world at large.

**2.** With individual believers. (*J. Lyth, D. D.*)

**The depths of salvation**

**I.** Christianity is a system of wonders.

**1.** The very proposal of salvation for sinners is a matter of wonder. God was not obliged to save. Man deserved to perish; and God could have filled his place instantly with better beings. Moreover, man is the solitary object of saving mercy. When sin broke out in heaven, God hurled the thunderbolt of a just vengeance. Certainly here is ground for amazement.

**2.** The incarnation of Christ was a miracle beyond any other miracle of God. Deity took upon Himself the form and nature of humanity. Among all God’s wonders, you can find no analogy for the person of Christ.

**3.** Our ordinary idea of the proceedings of justice is confounded by the sufferings of Christ. We connect suffering with sin; at least, we consider that an innocent being cannot justly be treated as a malefactor. Yet the sinless Son of God was a man of sorrows and died as a culprit, abandoned even by the Father whom He always pleased. Reason can only exclaim, “O the depth!” at this.

**4.** Amazement rises higher at the Bible representation that He suffered the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. How could justice be satisfied by the sufferings of an innocent One? How can it be a just thing that they should be accepted as a propitiation for our sins? God has taught us the fact, and hence we believe it; but the fact is a wonder. These are only examples. Things of the same marvellous nature run all through the system of redemption. Infidelity is confounded by these depths. But what confounds an infidel comforts a Christian.

**II.** Those wonders are reasons for our accepting it and being comforted by it.

**1.** They constitute a feature of our religion which comports with our experience on all other subjects. The facts which we have mentioned are all plainly revealed facts. There is no darkness or depth in them. The depth and darkness meet us only as we proceed to philosophise. The further we investigate the things of God anywhere the more deep and wonderful they become.

**(1)** The astronomer finds it so. His wonder grows as he passes the known suns and stars; and now, as he casts his keen eye out upon the illimitable space beyond him, he is compelled to feel that he has not yet passed the porch of the temple of God. All he can say is, “O the depth!”

**(2)** So in the ever-descending field of microscopic study.

**(3)** The providences of God, again, are full of wonders. What a marvel is human history!

**2.** There are many things of importance, but they are not all of equal value. Unorganised matter lies below the organisms of life. Brute life is of a lower rank than human. The mental kingdom, while superior to the vegetable and animal, is inferior to the moral. Now, we are limited creatures, and cannot have an equal understanding of all subjects, and must expect to meet with the highest wonders in the highest departments. An infidel tells us he meets with the most wonders in Christianity. For that reason he rejects it, and for that we glory in it. Consider two arguments here.

**(1)** God is glorious in everything, but not in everything of equal glory. His highest glory lies in His saving sinners. The angels knew this who sung over Bethlehem, “Glory to God in the highest.” Well, on that high field of wonders, where God is more glorious than anywhere else**,** shall we not expect Him to be more amazing than anywhere else?

**(2)** Consider the soul. It is immortal, and its capacities will expand for ever. It is to be saved or lost. When a soul is perilled, shall God for its salvation work no more wonders than He does about the petty interests of a world of matter and beasts, and threescore years and ten?

**3.** It is in these deep things of God only that we find provision for our deepest necessities. Reason cannot hope except before the amazing depths of God’s wisdom and mercy. As sinners, we need God to do for us just the wonders He has wrought. Had He not done them, we must have despaired. (*I. S. Spencer, D.D*.)

**Our proper attitude towards the deep things of God**

It remains for us dutifully and reverentially to adore that in the Divine counsels and ways which we do not, and, indeed, cannot, understand. There is no government that hath not its *arcana*; and it would be very foolish for us to imagine that there should be no secrets belonging to the Divine government. (*John Howe*.)

**The contemplation of God’s redeeming purpose**

should prompt—

**I.** Admiration of—

**1.** His wisdom.

**2.** His knowledge.

**II.** The confession of His unsearchableness in respect of—

**1.** His purpose and procedure.

**2.** His all-sufficiency.

**III.** The praise of His grace, which is—

**1.** Free.

**2.** Undeserved.

**IV.** The increase of His glory.

**1.** He is the end of all things.

**2.** To Him be glory for ever. (*J. Lyth, D.D*.)

**God’s conduct in the salvation of mankind**

This is the conclusion of Paul’s argument on this subject. He seems to be overwhelmed with the sense of its unsearchableness. The depths of God’s wisdom and knowledge appear in—

**I.** The manifestation of His righteousness in the restoration of rebels. Human monarchs have shown their justice in crushing rebels, but God in restoring them.

**II.** The destruction of the spirit of rebellion in the restoration of rebels, Human monarchs may deliver rebels, but they cannot destroy the spirit of rebellion, God does this.

**III.** The augmentation of the force of moral government in the restoration of rebels. Human monarchs may weaken their government by saving rebels, but God strengthens the force of His moral administration by redeeming transgressors.

**IV.** The promotion of all the rights of His subjects in the restoration of rebels. Human monarchs, by delivering rebels, endanger the rights of loyal citizens God, in the restoration of rebels, promotes the rights of all.

**V.** The election of earth instead of hell as the scene for the restoration of rebels. (*D. Thomas, D.D*.)

**God’s praise**

**I.** Its theme.

**1.** His wisdom.

**2.** His knowledge.

**3.** His judgments and procedure.

**II.** Its expression.

**1.** Wonder.

**2.** Submission.

**3.** Love. (*J. Lyth, D.D*.)

**Wisdom of God in redemption**

No one can be said to meditate aright on redemption by Christ who does not behold God’s manifold wisdom, as well as His other perfections, displayed therein. As we conclude him a very unskilful observer of a curious picture or statue who only takes notice of its dimensions in general, or the matter of which it is composed, its colouring, or framework, without considering the symmetry and proportion of all its parts, the mind, the genius, and intelligence shown in its design—so it is unworthy and below a Christian to be able only to say that Christ is a Saviour, or to have a general idea of this scheme of mercy, without having his thoughts suitably affected with the wonders of love and grace which it contains, and the design of all, and the adaptation of every part, to set forth the glory of the triune Jehovah. (*H. G. Salter*.)

**Incomplete presentations of the gospel**

My best presentations of the gospel to you are so incomplete! Sometimes, when I am alone, I have such sweet and rapturous visions of the love of God and the truths of His Word, that I think if I could speak to you then I should move your hearts. I am like a child who, walking forth some sunny morning, sees grass and flowers all shining with drops of dew. “Oh,” he cries, “I’ll carry these beautiful things to my mother!” and, eagerly plucking them, the dew drops into his little palm, and all the charm is gone. There is but grass in his hand, and no longer pearls. (

*H. W. Beecher*.)

**Limitation of human views**

There is a striking passage in which a great philosopher, the famous Bishop Berkeley, describes the thought which occurred to him of the inscrutable schemes of Providence, as he saw, in St. Paul’s Cathedral, a fly moving on one of the pillars. “It requires,” he says, “some comprehension in the eye of an intelligent spectator to take in at one view the various parts of the building, in order to observe their harmony and design. But to the fly, whose prospect was confined to a little part of one of the stones of a single pillar, the joint beauty of the whole, or the distinct use of its parts, was inconspicuous. To that limited view, the small irregularities on the surface of the hewn stone seemed to be so many deformed rocks and precipices.” That fly on the pillar, of which the philosopher spoke, is the likeness of each human being as he creeps along the vast pillars which support the universe. The sorrow which appears to us nothing but a yawning chasm or hideous precipice, may turn out to be but the joining or cement which binds together the fragments of our existence into a solid whole! That dark and crooked path, in which we have to grope our way in doubt and fear, may be but the curve which, in the full daylight of a brighter world, will appear to be the necessary finish of some choice ornament, the inevitable span of some majestic arch. (*Dean Stanley*.)

**How unsearchable are His Judgments, and His ways past finding out!*—***

**The unsearchableness of God**

**I.** When we cannot understand His ways it is enough to be assured—

**1.** That He knows what He does.

**2.** That He needs no counsellor.

**II.** Therefore ought we to resign ourselves to His will, with—

**1.** Resignation.

**2.** Obedience. (*J. Lyth, D.D*.)

**The unsearchableness of God’s judgments**

These words are the close of St. Paul s disputation concerning God s providence towards His ancient people, in rejecting the greatest part of them, on their refusal to embrace Christianity, and in admitting the Gentiles to favour on their compliance; in which proceeding the Jews could not discern God’s hand, nor allow such a dispensation to be worthy of Him. The apostle, after an able vindication of it, winds up the contest with the modest intimation that in this and all such eases, for entire satisfaction, we should have recourse to the incomprehensible wisdom of God, who frequently orders things in methods beyond our ability to trace. Note—

**I.** Some causes and reasons of that incomprehensibility.

**1.** As the dealings of very wise men sometimes are founded on maxims, and admit justifications not obvious to nor penetrable by vulgar conceit, so may God’s. As there are natural modes of being and operation—such as God’s necessary subsistence, His eternity without succession, *etc*.

so there may be prudential and moral rules far above our reach (Isa\_55:9). Some of these we may be incapable of knowing on account of our finite nature; others on account of our meanness and low rank among created beings. In such cases the absolute will, sovereign authority, and pure liberality of God, supply the place of reasons.

**2.** As the standing rules of God’s acting, so the occasional grounds thereof are commonly placed beyond the sphere of our apprehension. God is obliged to prosecute His own immutable decrees; “working all things according to the counsel of His own will”: which how can we anywise come to discover? God also has a perfect foresight of contingent events. He observes in what relation and degrees of comparison things stand towards each other; whereas we cannot tell what things to compare.

**3.** We are also incapable thoroughly to discern the ways of Providence, from our moral defects, in some measure common to all men; our stupidity, sloth, temerity, impatience, impurity, of heart, *etc*.

**4.** Again, the nature of those instruments which Divine Providence uses in administration of human affairs, hinders us from discerning it. The footsteps of Divine wisdom are far more conspicuous in the works of nature than in the management of our affairs, and while the one has confirmed faith, the other has bred doubt.

**5.** As in nature the influence of heaven and of inferior causes, so in the production of special events among men Divine and human agency are so combined, that it is not easy to discriminate what God performs by natural instruments, and what by superior efficacy.

**(1)** Not seeing the first, we are prone to ascribe too much to the last, which are most obvious.

**(2)** And this we are the more apt to do because the manner of Divine agency is ever soft and gentle. God so fashions the hearts of men, so manages their hands, so guides their steps, that even they who are most acted on by Him cannot feel the touch.

**6.** God, in His progress towards the achievement of any design, is not wont to go in the most direct and compendious ways, but commonly takes a large compass, enfolding several other coincident purposes; which moves our impatience, *etc*.

**7.** Like every wise agent, He is wont to act variously, according to the state and circumstances of things, or to the dispositions and capacities of persons.

**8.** There are different ends which Providence pursues in various order and measure, which we, by reason of our dim insight and short prospect, cannot descry.

**(1)** God permits things, bad in their own nature, having regard to their instrumental use and tendency.

**(2)** Also the expediency of things to be permitted or crossed, frequently consists, not in themselves singly taken, as particular acts or events, but in their conjunction with or reference to others, with which they may become subservient to a common end.

**9.** That Providence is sometimes obscure and intricate, may be attributed to the will of God, on many accounts designing it so. He will not glare forth in discoveries so bright as to dazzle or confound our weak sight.

**(1)** He meaneth thereby to improve and exalt our faith.

**(2)** It is fit also that He should thus in many things surpass our understanding, that He may appear to be God indeed.

**(3)** The obscurity of Providence conciliates an awful reverence towards it, as darkness raises a dread of invisible powers.

**(4)** It is also requisite that God should dispose many occurrences, cross to our notions, and offensive to our carnal sense, that we may thus be prompted to think of Him, and to seek Him.

**(5)** It is needful that the present course of Providence should not be perfectly clear and satisfactory, that we may be well assured concerning a future account, and forced in our thoughts to recur thither for a solution of our doubts and difficulties.

**II.** Some practical applications grounded on the foregoing reasons.

**1.** It should render us modest and sober in our judgment about providential occurrences, since it is plain arrogance or imposture to assume perfect skill in what passeth our capacity to learn.

**2.** It should make us cautious in passing judgment or censure on events, since it is temerity to give sentence on what is incapable of evidence.

**3.** It should repress wanton curiosity, which would only make us lose our time, *etc*.

**4.** It should keep us from conceit and confidence in our own wisdom.

**5.** It should preserve us from infidelity, and despair on account of any cross accidents.

**6.** It should prevent our taking offence at such.

**7.** It should guard us against security, or presuming on impunity for our miscarriages; for seeing that God does not always fully discover His mind, it is vain to suppose that, because He is now patient, He will always be so.

**8.** It should quicken our industry in observing and considering the works of Providence: the fainter our light is, the more attentive should we be in looking.

**9.** It should oblige us to be circumspect and wary in our conversation.

**10.** Also constantly to seek God, and to depend on Him for protection, and for the conduct of His grace, the only clue in this labyrinth.

**11.** In fine, it should cause us humbly to admire and adore that wisdom which governs the world in ways no less great and wonderful than just and holy. (*L Barrow, D.D*.)

**Man’s inability to find out God’s judgments**

**1.** That which first brought both a present guilt, and entailed a future curse upon mankind, was an inordinate desire of knowledge. And from the fall to this very day, this fatal itch has stuck so close to our nature, that every one is eager to know where he is called only to adore and obey.

**2.** The Scripture is in nothing more full and frequent than in representing the transcendency of God’s ways above all created intellectuals (Psa 139:6; Psa 36:6; Psa 18:9; Psa 77:19). If we consult its reports, or those of our own experience, about the amazing events of Providence, we shall find the result of our most exact inquiries in the text. I shall demonstrate that the most advanced wisdom of man is incompetent to judge of—

**I.** The reason or cause of God’s ways. The causes men assign of the passages of Providence are—

**1.** For the most part false, as *e.g.,*

**(1)** That the prosperous are the objects of God’s love; and the miserable of His hatred. And all this in defiance of the Spirit of God Himself who (Ecc\_9:1) assures us that “no man knows either love or hatred by all that is before him”; nor consequently can conclude himself in or out of favour with God by anything befalling him in this life. Otherwise Lazarus would have been in flames, and the rich man in Abraham’s bosom. God sometimes curses men with prosperity, and casts His Jobs upon dunghills, and sells His beloved Josephs into slavery.

**(2)** That the good only must prosper and the bad suffer. A most absurd assertion, for how is it that the good suffer and the bad prosper?—a fact which staggered Asaph (Psa\_73:2), and so confounded Jeremiah (Jer\_12:1), that he could almost have offered to dispute the point with God Himself. And from the same topic it was that Job’s friends argued, until they were confounded by God’s verdict on the whole matter.

**2.** Always imperfect. Who would assign an adequate reason of anything which God does, must see as far into it as God sees. There is no action of God but there is a combination of impulsive causes concerned in it, one or two of which man may light upon, but the weakness of his discerning powers keeps him inevitably a stranger to far the greater part of them. God, by one and the same numerical lot of providence, may intend to punish one nation, to advance another; to plant the gospel in a third, and to let in trade into a fourth; likewise to make way for the happiness of one man’s prosperity, and for the extinction of another’s; to reward the virtues of sober and industrious people, and to revenge the crimes of a vicious and rebellious; and we are no more able to search into these than we are to govern the world.

**II.** The issue and event of actions. Men usually prognosticate—

**1.** According to the measure of the wisdom of second agents. And it must be confessed that it is the best rule were it not controlled by two better, viz., Scripture and experience. The former of which brings in God laughing at the wisdom of the wise; taking and circumventing the crafty in their own wiles (Job\_5:12-13). And for the latter, history so abounds with instances of the most artificially-spun contrivances dashed in pieces by some sudden and unforeseen accidents, that to ascertain the event of the most promising undertaking, if we trust but our own eyes, we shall have little Cause to trust another’s wisdom.

**2.** From success formerly gained under the same or less probable circumstances. But remember

**(1)** That it is hard, and perhaps scarce possible to repeat any action under perfectly the same circumstances.

**(2)** That in most actions there are still some circumstances not observed, which may have a surer and more immediate influence upon the event than those which, coming more into view, are more depended upon.

**(3)** That the success of every action depends more upon the secret hand of God than upon any causes or instruments visibly engaged in it.

**3.** According to the preparations made for it, and the power employed in it. And yet we find that it is not always the bigger weight, but sometimes the artificial hand managing the balance which turns the scale. And in like manner, when we have raised armies and manned our fleets, we are still in the hand of that Providence which sometimes sets the crown of victory upon the weak and the few, and disappoints the hopes and breaks the force of the confident and numerous Could anything look more invincible than the Spanish Armada? But we find that there is no commanding the sea without being able to command the winds too. And what a painful defence is multitude on the one side, where Omnipotence takes the other!

**III.** The use and improvement. We may infer—

**1.** The vanity of making the future event, or presumed success of any enterprise, the rule of our present actings about the same.

**2.** The absolute necessity of an entire, total, unreserved dependence upon Providence in the most hopeful and promising condition of our affairs.

**3.** The impossibility of a rational dependence upon Providence with comfort, but in the way of lawful, honest, and religious courses. (*R. South, D. D*.)

**Plans of God not fully known**

I should like to hear any man attempt to interpret to a worm what it is going to be when it is a butterfly. Where is there a foreshadowing analogy, or anything to indicate to it what it is coming to in its fuller form? And how can any one disclose what is to be evolved when God’s work is completed in this life? For, although we may know something, our knowledge is fragmentary and limited. And it is a glorious consolation to believe that sufferings forgotten are not less causes of good than those thus are remembered, and that sufferings which apparently leave but little trace are working out in us great and blessed results in the kingdom to which we are hastening. (*H. W. Beecher*.)

**God’s ways inscrutable, but in accordance with the highest reason**

Natural instincts, and even moral sense, are no safe guide upon a subject which soars so infinitely above our limited capacity. We are children; and in considering the means by which our Heavenly Father will save us, it is wisdom to accept simply His own instructions, desperate folly and presumption to criticise those instructions by our puerile instincts. E.g., a father, inured to life upon the Alpine mountains, is under the necessity of crossing a very perilous glacier with his children. The children are of such an age that the direction, “Hold this, and keep at as great a distance from me as you possibly can,” can just be made intelligible to them, while the grounds of it, viz., that the weight of the party may be distributed, and not bear on one particular spot, which might thus give way, are, it may be, out of the reach of a child’s capacity. Let us suppose that the children, in fright, begin to reason about this counsel, and to judge of it by their natural instincts; conceive that one of them should think and say as follows: “Can our father, who loves to have us close around him, say, ‘Come not near me, child, at the peril of thy life’? Say it he may, but I will not believe such to be his meaning, for it conflicts with all my natural instincts, which are to cling round him in the moment of danger.” But shortly afterwards night falls, and the wearied children are irresistibly impelled to lie down without any covering, in which case death would overtake them. The father burrows in a snowdrift, and proposes that in the cavities so made the children shall lie, the cold snow piled over them, and only the smallest possible aperture allowed for the passage of the breath. Adults, of course, would be aware that this would be the only method of preserving the vital heat of the body; but not so the children. Snow, applied only to parts of the person, and not as a general wrapper, is bitterly cold; and the children, unable to understand, imagine cruelty in this arrangement. Now, the child who keeps at a distance from his father, and buries himself in the snow, is a wise child, because, renouncing the guidance of his instincts, he places faith in one manifestly his superior in capacity. The child who clings round his father’s neck upon the glacier and stretches his limbs beneath the open sky in distrust of his parent’s directions is a foolish child; for what is greater folly than to refuse to be guided by a recognised superior in wisdom? And it cannot be too strongly insisted upon, that one who, in investigating such a subject as the method of human salvation, follows the guidance of his natural instincts in preference to that of Revelation, is a weak person, not a man of bold and courageous thought. Simple dependence upon God, where God alone can teach, is the truest independence of mind. (*Dean Goulburn*.)

**Secrets of God**

Be not curious to search into the secrets of God; pick not the lock where He hath allowed no key. He that will be sifting every cloud may be smitten with a thunderbolt; and he that will be too familiar with God’s secrets may be overwhelmed in His judgments. Adam would curiously increase his knowledge; therefore Adam shamefully lost his goodness: the Bethshemites would needs pry into the ark of God; therefore the hand of God slew about fifty thousand of them. Therefore hover not about this flame, lest we scorch our wings. For my part, seeing God hath made me His secretary, I will carefully improve myself by what He has revealed, and not curiously inquire into or after what He hath reserved. (*T. Adams*.)

**For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?—**

**God all in all**

**I.** The challenge.

**1.** To human intellect.

**2.** To human merit.

**II.** The assertion. God is—

**1.** The source of all.

**2.** The agent in all.

**3.** The end of all.

**III.** The ascription.

**1.** To Him be glory.

**2.** On earth.

**3.** In heaven.

**4.** For ever. (*J. Lyth, D.D*.)

**God’s counsels are**

**I.** Deep.

**1.** Teaching us the feebleness of our understanding.

**2.** Checking our daring speculations.

II. True.

**1.** Inviting our confidence.

**2.** Commanding our submission.

**III.** Merciful.

**1.** Soliciting our love.

**2.** Inspiring our hope. (*J. Lyth, D. D.*)

**God’s independence**

Philo, the Jew, compares the great God to a tree, and all creatures to the leaves and fruits, which are all in the tree; but the metaphor is not complete, because you may remove fruit from the tree, but there can be no creature out of the power and will of God by which alone it can exist at all. If you remove the fruits from the tree the tree has at least lost something; but if all creatures were destroyed, yet still the Lord would be as infinitely God as He is now; if the creatures were multiplied, God were no more—and if diminished, He were no less. The creatures, may be likened to the waves, and God to the great sea; the waves cannot exist apart from the sea, nor the creatures apart from God: but no earthly figure of the Divine can be complete, for the waves are a portion of the sea, but the creatures are not God, nor do they contribute to His essence or attributes. The sea would be diminished if the waves were gone, but if you could take all creatures away, God would be no less God, nor less infinite than He is now. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

**For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things.*—***

**God all in all**

This is perhaps the most comprehensive account of the Deity in His relation to His works that is anywhere to be met with. All things are—

**I.** Of Him. He is of none. They originate in His will, and but for Him they would never have been.

**II.** By Him. He creates and sustains all.

**III.** To Him. All things are intended to manifest forth His glory, and will ultimately serve His purpose. He has made all things for Himself, and it is obviously meet that it should be so, that His will should be the law, His glory the end of the universe of which He is the Creator, the Supporter, and Proprietor. (*J. Brown, D.D*.)

**God all in all**

Of Him all things are as their Original Author and Creator; through Him, as the Giver and Conveyer of them to us; to Him, to His honour, for His use, and in His disposal; and no further or longer ours than He is pleased in mercy, not in justice, as a free gift, and not as a debt, to dispense them to us. (*Bp. Sanderson*.)

**God must be all in all**

**I.** Him first.

**II.** Him last.

**III.** Him midst.

**IV.** And without end. Amen. (*J. Lyth, D.D*.)

**God the first cause and last end**

**I.** The explication of the terms.

**1.** That God is the first cause, signifies—

**(1)** Negatively, that He had no cause, and is independent of every other being, and is eternally of Himself.

**(2)** Positively, that He is the cause and support of all things besides Himself (Joh\_1:3).

**2.** The last end; *i.e.,* that all things refer to Him; the aim of all things is the illustration of His glory, and the manifestation of His perfections.

**II.** The confirmation of the proposition.

**1.** By natural light.

**(1)** The notion of a God contains in it all possible perfection. Now the utmost perfection we can imagine is for a being to be always of itself, and to be the cause and support of all other things. From hence follows that all things must refer to Him as their last end. For every wise agent acts in order to an end. Now the end which is most worthy the attaining is the manifestation of God’s being and perfection, which is called God’s glory.

**(2)** These titles were discovered by the natural light of the heathens. Aristotle called God the first being, the first cause, and the first mover; and Plato calls God the author and parent of all things, the architect of the world, and of all creatures, the fountain and original of all things. Porphyry calls Him “the first,” from whence he reasons that He is the ultimate end, and that all things move towards God; that all motions centre in Him, because, saith he, it is most proper and natural for things to refer to their original, and to refer all to Him from whom they receive all. Antoninus, speaking of nature (which with the Stoics signifies God), had these words, “Of Thee are all things, in Thee are all things, to Thee are all things.”

**2.** From Scripture.

**(1)** Hither belong all those places where He declares Himself to be “the first and the last” (Isa\_41:4; Isa\_43:10; Isa\_44:6; Isa\_48:12-13; Rev\_1:8).

**(2)** But more expressly, see 1Co\_8:6; Act\_17:24.

**(3)** Hither we may refer those texts which attribute the same to the Second Person in the Trinity {Joh 1:3; Joh 1:10; 1Co\_8:6; Eph\_3:9; Col\_1:16-17; Heb\_1:2-3).

**III.** The application of the doctrine.

**1.** If God be the first cause of all things, from hence let us learn—

**(1)** With humility and thankfulness to own, admire, and bless God as the author of our being and of all the blessings we enjoy (Rev\_4:11; Psa\_103:1-4). With patience and quietness to submit to all events that come upon us, as coming from Him (1Sa\_3:18; Psa\_39:9).

**2.** If God be the last end of all, let us make Him our last end, and refer all our actions to His glory (Mat\_22:37; 1Co\_10:31). (*Abp. Tillotson*.)

**Laus Deo**

My text consists of monosyllables, but it contains the loftiest sublimities. Our great God alone can expound this verse, for He only can worthily set forth His own perfections. May He do so now! Consider—

**I.** The doctrine. All things are of Him as their source, through Him as their means, to Him as their end. They are of Him in the plan, through Him in the working, and to Him in the glory which they produce. Taking this general principle, you will find it apply to all things.

**1.** To the whole range of God’s works in creation and providence.

**(1)** There was a period when God inhabited eternity in His self-contained and solitary greatness. All things must be of Him in design, for there was no one with whom He could take counsel. Before His works of old, eternal wisdom brought forth the perfect plan of future creations, and every line must have been of the Lord alone. He might have made a different universe, and that He has made it what it is was because He saw fit to do so.

**(2)** When the plan was all laid down this was not enough; mere arrangement would not create. “Through Him” must all things be. There was no raw material ready, and there was none to help. He speaks, and the heavens leap into existence. He speaks again, and worlds are begotten with all the varied forms of life so fraught with Divine wisdom and matchless skill. Through Him were all things, from the archangel down to the insect. The same finger paints the rainbow and the wing of the butterfly. He who dyes the garments of evening in all the colours of heaven has covered the kingcup with gold, and lit up the glowworm’s lamp. Nature is as it is through the energy of the present God. Out upon those men who think that God has wound up the world like a clock, and left it to work for itself. Wherever thou art, thou art in God’s workshop, where every wheel is turned by His hand.

**(3)** But the great glory of all is that everything is to Him. God must have the highest motive, and there can be no higher motive than His own glory. When there was no being but Himself God could not have taken as a motive a creature which did not exist. The good of His creatures He considereth carefully, but even that is but a means to the main end. And the day shall come when even the fall will be seen not to have marred the Divine glory. His enemies shall bow their necks, whilst His people shall cheerfully extol Him.

**2.** To the grand work of Divine grace.

**(1)** Here everything is of God. The plan of salvation is no concoction of priests, but the offspring of a wisdom no less than Divine. None but God could have imagined a plan so just to God, so safe to man. And as the great plan is of Him, so the fillings up of the minutiae are of Him. God ordained the time and circumstances of the first promise, and the hour when the great promise-keeper should come, *etc*. Every stitch in the noble tapestry of salvation is of the Lord.

**(2)** Through Him. Through Him the Son of God is born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Spirit. In the great redemption God alone is exalted. And as through Him the atonement, so through Him the application of the atonement. By the power of the Spirit the gospel is daily preached, and through Him men are called and saved.

**(3)** All is to Him; we have not a note of praise to spare for another.

**3.** To the case of every individual believer.

**(1)** Of whom comes my salvation? That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

**(2)** Did it not also come through God; through faith, which was the operation of the Holy Spirit? And what didst thou believe in but in Jesus the Lord?

**(3)** Is it not also “to Him”?

**4.** To Christian work.

**(1)** The power comes from God.

**(2)** The success comes through God.

**(3)** The honour is to God.

**II.** Devotion. “To whom be glory for ever, Amen.” This should be—

**1.** The single desire of the Christian. He may desire prosperity or to attain more gifts and graces, *etc*., but it should only be that “to Him may be glory for ever.”

**2.** Our constant desire at our work behind the counter, or in the exchange, or walking in the fields, *etc*.

**3.** Our earnest desire. Do not speak of God’s glory with cold words, nor think of it with chilly heart.

**4.** Our growing desire. You blessed Him in your youth; do not be content with such praises as you gave Him then.

**5.** Make this desire practical. Praise God by your patience in pain, your perseverance in duty, your generosity in His cause, your boldness in testimony, your consecration to His work. (*C. H. Spurgeon*.)

**To whom be glory for ever. Amen**.—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 God’s grace, so should it fall at last into the ocean of His glory. (*Bp. Sanderson*.).