

What is Church? People asking questions

People ask questions.

Questions reveal the need for Answers.

Having questions reminds us of who we are, needing to know our place.

We sometimes don't ask questions – mainly men who get lost when they are driving.

They refuse to accept that they are lost – they really don't know their place.

We turn from 11 chapters of theology, trying to understand God, end up not with all our questions answered but with an awareness of our place: he is God and I'm not – and we turn to worship.

Romans 11:33-36

NLT version:

33 Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!

34 For who can know the Lord's thoughts?

Who knows enough to give him advice?

35 And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back?

36 For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.

Good news version:

33 How great are God's riches! How deep are his wisdom and knowledge! Who can explain his decisions? Who can understand his ways? 34 As the scripture says,

"Who knows the mind of the Lord?

Who is able to give him advice?

35 Who has ever given him anything,

so that he had to pay it back?"

36 For all things were created by him, and all things exist through him and for him. To God be the glory forever! Amen.

Questions are good. Questions are natural. We are made to ask questions.

When you come to church, what are the spiritual questions in your mind?

Because the Questions reveal our need for the Answers. They put us in our place.

We don't know or understand everything – we are not God. But it is okay to ask.

Certainty is unlikely in the face of eternal and beautiful things.

We are full of questions and incompleteness.

As we turn from theology/questions/discussions to worship we are left - not with comprehensive answers but with an awareness of our position – he is God and I'm not. Questions that put us in our place – of not knowing:

- Watching the eclipse - how did it make you feel? Brian Cox, on Today, “spectacular, felt like I was on a planet, watching the mechanics of the solar system being played out in front of me.” How does that all work? Where did it come from?
- Listening a piece of great music. How does this work? Why does it do this to me?
- Maths seems to be consistent, gives a really good system for understanding the way the world works – but mathematicians know they can’t answer every question. E.g. Godel’s incompleteness theorem – needs an infinite number of sets of axioms in order to prove a contradiction. If it needs something infinite, only God can complete that puzzle.
- Physics similarly. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics – you can’t know the position and the momentum of a sub-atomic particle. Someone does, but it’s not us.
- Some people – look at art or poetry and find it does something to them deep down which they can’t explain.

Your puzzles or journeys lead us into a place of humility before the One who has the Answers. There are mysteries and experiences and questions which we will never understand and to which we will never find the answers.

Church is made up of people who are asking questions. It is OK to ask questions. (What does it say about you if you are not asking questions?)

Romans 11:33-36 is all about questions and answers. It poses questions as a way of saying, “It’s okay to ask questions but at the end of the day we won’t get all the answers because he is God and we’re not.”

v.33 Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!

Well translated as “the hidden depths”. What Luther called, Deus absconditus, the hidden God. By definition God must know and have answers to everything - things we don’t know and understand. If we did we would be god. We know only what he reveals to us. So we have to live with the Question. Simply aware of God’s hidden depths of wealth and wisdom, of his decisions and his ways.



We can ask but at the end of the day his decisions are beyond us and his ways are unsearchable.

v.34,35 For who can know the Lord’s thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? 35 And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back?

Rhetorical questions – the answer is “no one” of course.

- We don’t know his thoughts – we wait for him to reveal some of them.
- We can’t give him advice – we’re grateful for the advice he gives us (we are not his counsellor).
- He doesn’t need to pay us back – we owe him everything, the very breath in lungs, the brain in our heads and the balance in our bank account.

v.36 For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.

Answers to our implied questions.

Question: Where did this all come from? Answer: He created the universe from nothing.

Question: How is this happening – my life? Answer: Through his creative and sustaining power.

Question: Why did this happen? Answer: For him – for his glory, for him to be enjoyed, dwelt on, worshipped.

What is church? A people asking questions

Church is full of people with questions. The what, how, why questions.

The painful, hurting, worrying questions.

It's okay to have questions – and to ask them.

But, as we see in this passage, the church re-frames the questioning environment.

We love science and maths and philosophy as they seek to explain how the world works.

We love the arts and creativity as it seeks to bring order out of chaos.

But the ultimate Answers lie in God alone.

CK Barrett, "The tangled problems of existence and history find their solution not in man but in God."



This is the refreshing honesty of being a follower of Jesus:

on the one hand it is good and healthy to come with questions

on the other hand, we can't and don't need to know all the answers

at some point we can pause our investigations and just enjoy a great God who loves us

What is church? People who find a place to go to God with their questions.

A people who pursue God, who worship him as they pursue answers.

We may/will never reach the end of that voyage with every question answered.

But we will find our place - kneeling safely at the merciful feet of the One who has every Answer.

All is not well today, but one day all will be well and our questions will fade like the mist in the morning sunlight as we begin to understand the true beauty, majesty and sovereignty of the one we worship.

David Flowers

22 March 2015