

DON'T SECOND GUESS GOD!

Text: Romans 11:33-36

According to a Gallup poll last June, approval ratings for our government are at historic lows. Less than a third of Americans approve the way the President is handling his job, while only 19% give their “thumbs up” to Congress. Even the Supreme Court’s approval ratings are low – and most people pay about as much attention to the Supreme Court as to the price of mutton in Uzbekistan.

Whether it’s runaway inflation, the collapse of the housing market, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or government scandals, there are plenty of reasons today for people to be dissatisfied with their leaders. It’s easy to criticize their mistakes, their poor decisions, their short-sighted policies. But we should ask ourselves if we could have done any better.

Granted, our politicians are human beings and they’re not perfect, sometimes they act in their own best interests, so we need to hold them accountable. But we run into trouble when we complain about the way God’s doing his job. I wonder what his approval rating is. I imagine it’s quite a bit less than 100%. In fact, I’m sure every one of us can find something in our lives that didn’t go the way we wanted it to, situations we wish we had never gotten into, tragic events that make absolutely no sense to us. But before we criticize God’s leadership, as if we could do his job any better, let’s take a closer look at the words the Apostle Paul wrote at the end of Romans 11. He tells us: **Don’t second-guess God!**

1. Trust his planning

Good leadership begins with a good plan for the future. For example, everybody knows that Madison’s population is swelling like a big old watermelon on the vine. Our local and state officials are trying to prepare for the future by widening roads and building new exits for the Interstate. But the city’s growth is outpacing its infrastructure. That new high school should have been built by now, and they should have figured out how to pay for it too.

It’s hard to plan for the future. Look at how many people lost their homes because they didn’t plan on their interest rates going up. Or how many of us wish we would have pulled out of the stock market before the bottom fell out? We never know what’s lurking just around the corner.

How about planning for eternity? Most people don’t even think about it, they don’t want to think about it. But can just leave a detail like our eternal soul’s destination for the last minute? When we’re stretched out on a hospital bed staring up at the ceiling, is that the time to turn over in our minds what we’re going to say to God?

Our planning is pathetic. That’s why we need to trust God’s plans, even if we don’t understand them. In our lesson today the Apostle Paul writes, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God...Who has known the mind of the Lord?” As we’ve been studying the last couple of weeks, God’s plans included bringing the Gentiles into his family and displacing the Jews from their favored position. In other parts of scripture, this is called a “mystery” – better file it as “unsolved” however because no matter how carefully we look in ourselves, we find nothing to make God love us. If the National Enquirer can discover a political candidate’s marital unfaithfulness three years after it happened, can we hide any of our dark secrets from God?

But we don’t have to, because of God’s grace, his undeserved, unearned love for us. We’ll never run out of it. It’s like walking into a WalMart store with a blank check and cleaning the place out. Jesus Christ signed that check with the blood he shed on the cross. And this was all according to the plan God had cooking from eternity.

It’s a plan that includes our baptism, our conversion to faith, and everything else that happens in our life, good or bad, because it’s all perfectly integrated. God’s plan to save us is deep waters. But whether you’re swimming at your neighborhood pool or in the ocean, you only use the top 36 inches. Even if we can’t get to the bottom of God’s plans, he’s told us enough to keep us floating.

2. Live by his timetable

We've all set up our own personal timetable: by our mid-twenties we finish school and establish our career, by our 30's we buy our first home and have kids, in our 40's and 50's we make our fortune and then we retire to some sunny little town near the beach, where we can put up our feet and listen to Jimmy Buffet songs all day long.

But no matter how carefully we weave our plans, a little snag appears and everything unravels. We don't get the career of our dreams, we get a job that pays the bills. Our children miss their scheduled appearance in our lives. Divorce resets our financial clock to zero. Health issues tarnish our golden years. Our self-imposed deadlines pass and we beat ourselves up, or we blame someone else.

We feel this need to create benchmarks for ourselves, in order to determine if we're getting anywhere in life. But we can't do that to God. We can't pin God down and expect that he's going to do this or that for us by a certain date. Paul says that "[God's] paths [are] beyond tracing out." God's paths cannot be tracked, like an animal that leaves no footprints, or a crime scene where there are no clues. And lest we think this is unfair the Apostle asks, "Who has been [God's] counselor?" Who are we to think we can give God advice on how to run the universe? Think of what a disaster it would be if we had to help him schedule the rising and fall of the ocean tides, or the migration of birds, or the amount of rainfall and sunshine we receive?

We're in no position to create or implement a timetable for our lives. That's why we need to live by God's timetable. We know it's a good one, because he sent his Son Jesus at just the right time. Nobody could have guessed what God was up to when he let the Romans conquer Israel, but God used that political situation to spread the news of Jesus all over the world.

We catch only glimpses of what God's up to in our lives. It's like driving on a foggy day – you can only see about 500 feet ahead of you or behind you. I don't like driving in the fog, but it never stopped me from going where I needed to go. You trust that the road will keep going on ahead of you. In the same way, we can't really see too far ahead into the future, and we quickly forget what's led up to this point in our lives. It may seem like we're not making much progress. But we don't have to second-guess God. All we need to do is keep following the road he leading us down.

3. Give him the credit

And we also need to remember where we're headed, so that we give him the credit he deserves. We have a bad habit of taking credit away from God and giving it to ourselves. We're so proud of our achievements, our home, our kids, our job – for a little while, we entertain this illusion that we're responsible for our success. Then reality sets in, our plans go awry, and then we have the gall to blame God!

We forget that God's not accountable to us. The apostle writes, "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" If a bank loans you money to buy a house, they have every right to expect you'll pay them back. But what does God owe us? Are we going to foreclose on God?

Our life may not have turned out the way we wanted it to, but that's no reason to second-guess God. Instead, it's reason to give him glory. Because God's goal is to get us to heaven, how could we want things to be any different in our lives? How much is that new car, that big boat, or that long life worth compared to being in heaven forever? What we think are God's miscues are actually God's rescues, as he shuts doors that lead us away from him, and opens the ones which draw us closer.

God doesn't have an easy job. We don't make his job any easier, resisting his will, questioning his leadership, thinking we know better than he does. But there's no mistake about his love for us, no second-guessing his plan to save us. And because Jesus submitted perfectly to his heavenly Father's will, we have God's full approval. AMEN.