

Romans 11:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

Analysis

Paul cites Job 41:11 (LXX): **Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?** (ἐῖ τις προέδωκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνταποδοθήσεται αὐτῷ). The question targets human presumption of merit. No one has given first (προέδωκεν, προέδωκεν) to God such that God owes recompense. Salvation is not a transaction where humans contribute, creating divine obligation. God is debtor to no one.

This reinforces grace theology: we contribute nothing to our salvation; it's pure gift. If we gave God anything first, His response would be repayment (debt), not grace. But since we gave nothing, His salvation is mercy. This destroys all boasting (3:27). Applied to Romans 9-11: neither Jew nor Gentile contributed to their salvation. God's mercy is sovereign, unearned, and magnificent. No one can claim God 'owes' them salvation based on ethnicity, works, or anything else.

Historical Context

Job 41:11 (in context) emphasizes God's absolute ownership and sovereignty. Paul applies this economically: God owns everything, owes nothing, gives freely. This was countercultural in both Jewish merit-theology and Greco-Roman patron-client systems where benefactors expected reciprocity.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the truth that 'no one has given to God first' demolish all human pride and merit-based thinking?
2. What attempts do people make to 'give to God first' in order to obligate Him to save them?
3. How does this verse safeguard the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone?

Interlinear Text

ἢ	τίς	προέδωκεν	αὐτῷ	καὶ	ἀνταποδοθήσεται	αὐτῷ
Or	who	hath first given	to him	and	again	to him
G2228	G5101	G4272	G846	G2532	G467	G846

Additional Cross-References

Job 41:11 (Parallel theme): Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.

Job 35:7 (Parallel theme): If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?