

Romans: The Good News of God

The End Is Praise

Romans 16:25-27

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Scripture

Today we conclude our study in Romans. Let's read Romans 16:25-27:

²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)

Introduction

William Tyndale, the pioneer English Bible translator, wrote these famous words in his prologue to Romans (in the 1534 edition of the English New Testament):

Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure [gospel]. . . and also a light and a way in unto the whole scripture, I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it by rote but also exercise himself therein evermore continually as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too oft or study it too well: for the more it is studied the easier it is, the more it is searched the more precious things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.

Such was Tyndale's opinion some 450 years ago, and it remains mine today.

Paul's letter to the Romans is the most closely reasoned and compelling book of the New Testament. Its massive theology, so

ably argued in the first eleven chapters, logically proceeds from the statement of the gospel in the opening verses of chapter 1 to the need for the gospel because of man's sin in chapters 1-3.

Next it describes the provision of the righteousness which comes by faith in chapters 3 and 4.

Then our position in Christ is beautifully stated in chapter 5.

The secret of spiritual victory is mapped out in chapters 6-8.

And finally, in chapters 9-11, a vindication of God's work in history is provided.

As Paul concludes his argument, his foundational theology gives way to an appropriately rousing doxology in 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

There is simply nothing like the first eleven chapters of Romans.

Then follows the properly compelling call to practical Christian living in chapters 12-15, which begins with these words:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

In logical succession Paul encourages us to practice our theology by using our gifts to serve one another in love. We are to subject ourselves to the authority over us, living by the law of love in the Church, offering all of life to God.

This section also concludes with another doxology in Romans 15:33, "May the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

Then, as we saw last time, Paul gives his greetings to all the saints in Rome and closes with yet another doxology: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (16:20b).

These are the magnificent structures of the greatest theologi-

cal treatise ever written. The word “God” is used no less than 163 times (even more than the verb “to be,” which occurs in its various forms only 113 times). There is nothing like the book of Romans!

Now comes the end of the letter. His friends have chimed in with their own greetings, and Paul takes the pen in his own hand and he writes the last few lines.

We know this because in 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18 he mentions that he does this in every letter so his readers will know the letter is not a forgery.

Perhaps with pen poised he hesitated for a moment, and then he began to write. What did he write? Another doxology, of course, the longest of all his doxologies, and one of the most beautiful. I have titled it, “The End Is Praise.”

Logically, there is no other way he could have ended his magnificent letter to the Romans, and there is no other way we can properly end our study of his letter.

Lesson

Paul’s final praise is a model for all times, a model for our song in the Lord. Let us study it with an eye to the kind of praise the truths of Romans should call from us. Essentially there are two broad categories of praise:

1. Praise for God’s *Work* (16:25-26), and
2. Praise for God’s *Wisdom* (16:27).

I. Praise for God’s Work (16:25-26)

Paul begins by praising God for his work in strengthening his children: “**Now to him who is able to strengthen you. . .**” (16:25a).

We see the idea more fully when we understand that the root from which the word “**strengthen**” comes from is the word “prop,” as with a prop which holds something up. God is able to make us stand, thereby strengthening and establishing us. The

same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, which says God is able to “establish” our hearts in blameless holiness.

The thrust here at the end of the great theological foundation of Romans is that spiritually God is able to make us stand strong and steadfast. He props his people up so they will not fall.

Perhaps Paul is considering his readers’ life in Rome now and in the future, seeing their struggles. Though he cannot do anything for them, he knows God is able to make them stand, and for this he offers doxology (a word of praise to God).

God can strengthen us and make us strong and steadfast in any circumstance. And when he so chooses, he demonstrates this in the physical realm as well.

Years ago when Ira Sankey was at the height of his ministry and traveling on a steamer in the Delaware River, he was recognized by some of the people on board. They had seen his picture in the newspaper and knew he was associated with evangelist D. L. Moody. When he was asked to sing one of his own compositions, Sankey said he preferred the hymn by William Bradbury, “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.” He suggested that everyone should join in the singing. One of the stanzas begins, “We are Thine, do Thou befriend us; be the guardian of our way.”

When he finished, a man stepped out of the shadows and inquired, “Were you in the army, Mr. Sankey?”

“Yes, I joined up in 1860.”

“Did you ever do guard duty at night in Maryland, about 1862?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Well, I was in the Confederate Army,” said the stranger, “and I saw you one night at Sharpsburg. You were wearing your blue uniform, and I had you in my gun sight as you stood there in the light of the full moon. Then just as I was about to pull the trigger, you began to sing.”

Sankey was astounded as he recalled the incident.

“It was the same hymn you sang tonight,” continued the man. “I couldn’t shoot you.”

There is no doubt about it—God can make us stand firm under his protection! God strengthens and protects his people!

However, the principal thrust in verse 25 is on God strengthening his people in *salvation*. Since our salvation is all of God, God can certainly make his people stand. Paul phrased it this way in Philippians 1:6: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

There is no fear he cannot relieve, no danger from which he cannot deliver, no anxiety he cannot quiet, and no despair he cannot lift. This is good news! Because of the infallible logic of Romans, because everything is of God, we are strengthened. And for this Paul offers doxology at the end of the book of Romans.

Believe it! God is able to strengthen us and make us stand!

As Paul further expresses his thought in verse 25, he tells us how God strengthens us: **“according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.”** We were strengthened initially through Jesus Christ, and we are maintained continually by him.

John 1:1 tells us that Jesus existed from the very beginning as the Word. He was the ultimate communication of God, and he desired to communicate to us. So he came into the world, and the apostle John was able to rejoice with these words: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18). In the Greek this literally reads, “He has exegeted him.” Jesus is the exegesis, the explanation of the Godhead. Therefore, our knowledge of Jesus is the key to knowing God, and to standing and being strengthened.

That is why Jesus prayed, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

The key to standing is making Jesus the center of everything. Moreover, the story of Jesus should be our constant meditation, as it was for Paul. Then we will be able to stand, for it is Jesus who strengthens us.

If you are struggling and have been tottering, focus on Jesus,

read about him, think about him, make the Gospels your spiritual meat and potatoes, the sustenance of your life.

The second aspect of our being strengthened is given in the last half of Romans 16:25 where Paul says, “**according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages.**” In other words, we are strengthened when and as the ancient mystery is opened to us.

How is this so? Part of the answer lies in the word “**mystery**” (*mysterion*), which in the New Testament does not mean mysterious or secretive (as the English word suggests) but rather *a secret which was once hidden but is now revealed*.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse illustrated this idea when he recounted how he once employed a single woman named Elizabeth as his private secretary who was terrific, and so far as he knew had never dated anyone. This was fine with him because he did not want to lose her. However, one Sunday morning as he parked his car someone approached him saying, “Max and Elizabeth are engaged.” He did not believe it. However, when he got to the church door someone else said the same thing. When he stepped into his office there stood Elizabeth beaming radiantly, confirming the engagement. She and her new husband planned to serve with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Mexico. Barnhouse reflected:

Here was a true *mysterion* in the New Testament sense. It had been completely hidden, absolutely unknown, totally unsuspected. Then suddenly it was whispered to one person, and the news spread like leaves in the wind. . . . True, after we knew that the young couple were engaged, we could look back and remember certain circumstances which might have led us to suspect if we had only been thinking in that direction.

Here in Romans a great and ancient secret has been thrown wide-open to believers by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the mystery of Jesus, which Paul calls “this mystery, which is Christ in you” in Colossians 1:27. God has given Jesus to us through the Virgin Birth, through his absolutely perfect earthly life, through his

vicarious death for us, through his breaking the bonds of death and ascending to the right hand of the Father. Thus the *mysterion* has been opened to us. We cannot understand everything, for even in eternity the wonder of it will continue to unfold. Yet now, in time, we understand what was in ages past darkly veiled.

There follows from this the grand mystery of the Church, which is like a marriage. Ephesians 5:32 says, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” The marriage relationship illustrates the great mystery of the personal relationship which exists between each believer and Jesus.

The spiritual understanding of the mystery of the Church, the inner secret which was hidden and now is made known, can be more fully apprehended by meditating on the tiny phrase, “in Christ.” Paul uses this word 11 times in the first fifteen verses of Ephesians concerning us and Jesus Christ: “in Christ Jesus” (v. 1), “in Christ” (v. 3), “in him” (v. 4), “in the Beloved” (v. 6), “in him” (v. 7), “in Christ,” (v. 9), “in him” (v. 11), “in Christ” (v. 12), “in him” and “in him” (v. 13), “in the Lord Jesus” (v. 15).

This amazing reciprocal truth is the signature of the Christian life: I am in Christ, and he is in me. No other religion knows anything of this. It is our *mysterion*.

Moreover, one day our union will bring such a bloom that were we to see it now, we would not believe it—“we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). All our sin and frailty shall be gone, and we shall be like the one who saved us. Amazing!

To quote Ephesians 5:32 again, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” Beloved, this is cause to praise. Our theology becomes doxology!

The extent of the mystery is underlined by the fact that it includes both Jews and Gentiles. Paul explains in Ephesians 3:1-6:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When

you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

There were explicit hints of this in the Old Testament. Consider, for example, God's word to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, ". . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Similar promises occur in Genesis 18:18 and 22:18. The ancestry of Christ had several Gentile women in it. However, it was a dim secret in Old Testament times. But Romans 16:26 of our text emphasizes the opening of the mystery to the Gentiles, which has **"now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith."**

The Old Testament Scriptures now can clearly be seen to teach this truth, and the nations (the Gentiles, the *goyim*) are learning the obedience of faith. This mystery is nothing less than a miracle. God's salvation extends to all races, and those who receive it are "in" Christ and he is "in" them. Moreover, all Jewish and Gentile believers are brothers and sisters together.

What a *mysterion*, what a miracle, and what a call to praise God! God is able to prop us up. Actually, he is able to do even more. He is able to strengthen us. His way of doing this is Jesus! When Jesus is the subject of our proclamation, our conversation, our meditation, we stand! And as we live and grow in Jesus, the *mysterion* opens wider and wider, and we become more firmly established. The unfolding mystery of God Incarnate invades our souls and draws us up to glory:

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
'Tis a Heaven of Heavens to me,
And it lifts me up to glory,
For it lifts me up to Thee.*

Thus we stand strong! The mystery of our union in the Lord Jesus Christ as bride and groom opens wider and wider. This is not hopeful thinking. This is no pious rhetoric. It is true! Jesus is in me and you, and we are in him. And this *mysterion* which makes us stand is for all the world. Through Christ, believing Jews and Gentiles stand together and will be established for eternity. This is Paul's doxology!

Perhaps if he had not already said it, he would have now said, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (11:36). Praise is to be our constant occupation and preoccupation. Revelation 7:11-12 says:

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

II. Praise for God's Wisdom (16:27)

Paul fittingly ends Romans with praise to God for his wisdom: ". . . **to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen**" (16:27). Our God is the only God. There is none but him. He is incomprehensible.

One day a little boy was drawing a picture for his teacher. "What are you drawing?" asked the teacher.

"I'm drawing God."

"You cannot do that. No one knows what God looks like."

"They will when I am finished!" said the boy confidently.

The little boy did not quite have the idea, unless by "when I am finished" he meant finished with this life. Then we will all have a clearer idea of God, though we will also keep learning more about him for all eternity.

Our God is also the *only wise God*. In affirming this, I am

reminded that whatever God is, he is so infinitely. Therefore, God is infinite wisdom. Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by perfect means. This our God does without limit.

In his wisdom he has made it possible for those who were once bound to earth by their own sinful depravity to be loosed from their sins and to know the throne of God as eternal home. He has made it possible for men who were made lower than the angels to rise higher than the angels. He has made it possible for us to become his own sons and daughters.

For all this there can only be doxology—**“. . . to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”**

Conclusion

Romans is indeed the good news of God.

It is good news for those of us who know that there is a God who is absolutely holy and that we do not have a relationship with him because our sin is a barrier to fellowship with God. In his mercy God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to this world. He lived a perfect, sinless life. He eventually went to the cross to pay the penalty for the sin of sinners such as ourselves.

The way we come into a right relationship with God is by believing that Jesus paid the penalty for our sin.

And the way we know that we have come into a right relationship with God is that our lives will be completely transformed. We will offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God, to be and to do all that he demands of us.

And we will begin praising God now for the salvation that he has given to us—a salvation that will carry us into heaven to be with him for all eternity. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for the good news of God. Thank you that you have provided salvation to us in the person of your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We praise and thank you for your mercy to us. Enable each one of us to receive and live daily by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.