

## The Goal of the Gospel is Glory to God

### Romans 16:25-27

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We come now to the final three verses in Romans. After 430 verses, today are verses 431, 432, and 433. If you were Paul, having written 430 of the most wonderful verses any human pen has ever composed, how would you end it? Like *War and Peace* with 50 pages of concluding thoughts? A cliffhanger of some sort? Perhaps a *see you soon when I get to Rome*? Or just a *Sincerely, The Apostle Paul*?

How Paul ends Romans is itself a powerful lesson in what gospel theology should do in our hearts. Here are the last three verses in Romans:

*"Now 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 but 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—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen"* (Romans 16:25–27 ESV).

The heading on your Bible probably says, "Doxology." Mine does. *Doxa* is the word for glory or praise, *ology* is the study or expression of. *Doxology* is therefore, "praiseology." "Gloryology." We could call it worship. Adoration. Delight. Paul sums up all that he has said in Romans in these words.

There is a term in music called the leitmotif. A leitmotif is a series of notes or chords that are a theme of a song. Typically this is applied to more classical type music but popular type music has it as well. A few notes that are theme notes give the whole song cohesion. Easy example, in *The Imperial March* from *Star Wars*: *dum, dum, dum, da-da dum, da-da dum*. Or the theme from the *Indiana Jones* movies: *Do Dah do do, do dah do*. It shows up throughout the song. Leitmotif. It's effective because it brings the listener back to the core. It ties up all the loose ends.

These verses are Paul's leitmotif. He ends where he began. He ends summarizing all he's said. He ends vertical. He ends with God.

This is one long sentence in the Greek. It could have been much shorter. He could have said, *"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ... to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen"* (Romans 16:25, 27). Instead, he interjects in the middle three "according to's." All of them he has said previously in Romans—familiar notes, leitmotifs—*Do Dah Do Do*. We should smile as we hear them yet again. Let's dig in.

*"Now to him who is able to strengthen you."* The "him" here is identified in verse 37 as God. Now to God who is able to strengthen you. Other translations say, *establish*. Both are right and both indicate that Paul is talking about the durability of our faith—our endurance and perseverance in the faith. It is God who strengthens and establishes us. He does so by means, or resources he provides, which are these three "according to's."

God strengthens us and gives us the spiritual resources to stay in the faith until we die. To stay saved.

Thursday, I was eating lunch with my daughters. We were talking about the possibility of them someday having babies and becoming mommies. I said, *"If you have a baby and become a mommy, then Daddy becomes a grandpa."* My 7-year-old said rather cavalierly, *"If you're still around."* Nice. Apparently, she isn't sure I'm going to make it long enough to be a grandpa. I'll need a lot of endurance to make it that long.

What an assurance it is that while we may need endurance, our God gives us all we need to make it. Jude ends his letter with a doxology and the same note, *"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy"* (Jude 24).

I take from this that first-century Christians had struggles that made them wonder if they were going to last; if their faith was going to sustain them or not. While the Pax Romana kept the Roman empire in a certain global peace, turmoil and plague and disease and death were a constant reality in Rome. Not to mention, persecution in Rome was about to go crazy. These Roman Christians would endure horrifying persecution and atrocities.

What did the Roman Christians need? Assurance that their faith was going to sustain them. In other words, they were just like us. Our problems are slightly different but our fears are the same. Our doubts are the same. If Paul were writing a letter to us, let's say it was called, *1 Bethelonians*, it's likely he would end his letter to us the same way. *Life is hard. God is greater. He is able to strengthen you.*

Dear flock, in the challenging year we have had, our faith has been tested and tried. It continues to be. My faith will remain established and steadfast as long as I derive my confidence in God over my circumstances, greater than my circumstances. He is able to sustain me and he promises that he always will. As the Psalmist writes, *"Why, my soul, are you downcast?... Put your hope in God"* (Psalm 42:5).

How can I be sure of this? Now Paul reaches back into what he's already said in Romans to explain how all these truths should breathe hope into our souls. Remember these leitmotifs! They all start with "according to."

### **The Gospel – it Nourishes Us!**

*"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ"* (Romans 16:25 ESV).

Paul calls it "my gospel" in other places as well. This doesn't mean he is the architect; it refers to Paul's direct calling from Jesus as an apostle to the Gentiles. The preaching of Jesus Christ isn't hearing Jesus' actual sermons but rather, all true preaching is about him. It is a declaration of his person and work and salvation by faith in him; his death for our sins. His glory and beauty and worthiness.

Now what does all this sound like? It sounds like Romans. Paul could have written on any number of subjects in this letter to the Roman church. Visit a Christian bookstore, if you can find one, and see all the subjects Christians can write about.

But what Paul wrote to them was not a treatise on Christian marriage or friendship or how to raise boys, he wrote to them a detailed treatise on how God makes sinners righteous

before him forever. How Jesus satisfied the wrath of God making salvation available to all by faith, not by works or spiritual heritage. It is not who we are, it is who Christ is, that matters.

Too often, people view the gospel as what gets you saved and don't realize it's what keeps us saved too. We never outgrow the need for what the gospel tells us about who God is, who we are, who Christ is, what salvation by grace means, and how all this is about God. As the puritans used to say, *preach the gospel to yourself every day*. I have a little saying I got from somewhere that I often say in my prayers as a reminder to me of the gospel. *I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior*. There it is.

As we daily revel in the sovereign grace of God, the sovereign love of God, the astonishing work of Jesus, the glory of the gospel sustains my faith and keeps me saved. It establishes me in the gospel of God.

### **The Revealed Plan of God – it Strengthens Us!**

*"...according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations"* (Romans 16:25).

When we use the word *mystery*, we typically mean something that is hidden or unable to be known. When the New Testament uses the word *mystery*, it means "something that was unknown but now has been revealed." That's the sense here. It was a mystery kept secret for long ages. Indeed. God purposed all this before even creating the universe, before creating the angelic realm, before there was time at all, when all there was was God. Way back then God purposed his plan to unveil the glory of the Son. Colossians 1:18 (NIV), "so that in everything he might have the supremacy." Even the angels didn't know or understand what God was up to.

But the days of this being a secret are over. The Old Testament unveiled this in part. As Hebrews tells us, the Old Testament Levitical system of worship was a shadow of perfection that came with Jesus. The great Jewish scholars didn't understand and even the disciples whom Jesus told, didn't understand until after his resurrection.

Through them, and the gospel, and the mission of the church, this gospel is for everyone! All ethnē. All nations. All peoples. There we have a major theme in Romans, that Jesus is the Savior of all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, the gospel is for everyone. It took Peter having a vision of a sheet from heaven to realize the universal scope of God's plan. The apostles struggled initially to see this. It began as an unknown mystery in the mind of God, but now it is out for all to see, hear, and be saved by faith.

This is the overarching story of history. I wonder if you think of the world and history and the future this way? I think many Christians don't. What is human history about? The advancement of ideas and human ingenuity. The struggle of haves and have nots. The sad story of genocide and power. Or, most commonly, how amazing man is. Humanism. Look what we have become. *Look at our technology! Look at our achievements! Look at us!* Man thinks the story is about him. Our story and our glory. God knows the story is about him. It is about Jesus. His story. His glory. That is what is unveiled in the gospel. Do you really believe that Jesus is coming back again? Do you really believe there is a final judgment by God? Do you really believe that history consummates in heaven and a new earth and us with God forever?

That's the story. The story of his glory. When I see the world this way, it encourages my faith when life is hard.

*"This is my Father's world:  
O let me ne'er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the Ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world:  
Why should my heart be sad?  
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!  
God reigns; let earth be glad!"<sup>1</sup>*

### **The Command of God – it Changes Us!**

*"...according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith..."*  
(Rom. 16:26 ESV).

He just addressed obedience in our previous section, so I won't repeat last week other than to note, again, that it is the obedience of faith, not faith in obedience. We are saved by trusting in Jesus, not our obedience. But the kind of faith that saves is a kind of faith that changes us. It is the byproduct of the miracle of salvation in our lives. The fruit, not the root. Sadly, millions will miss heaven because they mistook the root for the fruit. You might as well leap the Grand Canyon as obey your way to God. The true gospel is that God leaped the Grand Canyon to get to us.

Hear now, the last words of Romans, *"To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen"* (Romans 16:27). Is there a more God-centered book of the Bible than Romans? Here is how he started it, *"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God"* (Romans 1:1). How does he end it? *"To the only wise God be glory"* (Romans 16:27). Starts with God. Ends with God.

He ends with amazement and wonder. Even Paul, who understood these doctrines of God and salvation better than anyone. Even Paul, of whom the Apostle Peter wrote and said, he says things that are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16). The other apostles marveled at Paul's insights. Yet, the one who knew them the best says, *"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"* (Romans 11:33)

I have told this story before but it highlights this point. Years ago when I ministered in Indianapolis, the Lead Professor of the Kidney at IU Medical School was a friend. This is the guy who teaches all the people you and I go to about the kidney. He has an Ivy League doctorate totally focused on the kidney. One day we were having breakfast together and he drew out the kidney in detail on the napkin. He said, *there's this amazing function and then this does this and that does that and....* He gets to the end of his explanation and he said, *we actually haven't even begun to understand the kidney.* A world expert on the kidney marvels at it and as much as he knows—more than nearly anyone else—he can only sit in amazement.

That's the sense here at the end of Romans. The guy who knows the gospel deeper and better than anyone else, the guy who writes the most expansive explanation ever of God's gospel of salvation, gets to the end of the letter and says, *all praise to the all-wise God.*

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<sup>1</sup> Maltbie D. Babcock, "This is My Father's World (1901).

In this way, Romans itself fulfills this overarching purpose, *it brings glory to God*. You cannot read Romans and think humans are awesome. No, we are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God.

But at every point in the story of the gospel, it is God whose mercy, kindness, grace, goodness, and love shines through. It's almost as if this whole thing was planned to do that very thing, shine through the glory of God. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "*What is the chief end of man? Answer: To glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*"<sup>2</sup>

I started with a music illustration; I'm ending with two. Johann Sebastian Bach. Many consider him the greatest composer of all time. Einstein said of him, "*This is what I have to say about Bach's life work: listen, play, love, revere - and keep your trap shut.*"<sup>3</sup> Bach was also a protestant Christian who understood theology in music. As he started each new musical piece, he would write JJ at the top of the page. *Jesu Juva*. "Help me, Jesus." When he completed the composition, he would write *SDG*. Soli Deo Gloria. To God be the glory. Listen again to the last words of Romans, "*To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen*" (Romans 16:27). What is it? Paul writing, *SDG*. To God alone be the glory.

I read a story that I searched and searched for, but I couldn't find it, so I have to tell it from memory. There was a famous conductor of a world-famous symphony. They were performing a piece by Bach or Beethoven. I can't remember. As the symphony concluded the deeply moving and beautiful piece, the crowd exploded in response, rose to their feet, cheering and cheering and clapping and clapping. The conductor turned to them and waited for silence. He then said through tears, "*I am nothing. Beethoven is everything.*"<sup>4</sup>

This is how Romans ends too. If we have taught well at all, all our hearts should arrive at the same place. Even the brilliance of Paul in what he wrote is dwarfed by the wisdom and glory of God. It's as if Paul ends with, *I am nothing. We are nothing. God is everything!*

And the church says, *Amen*.

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<sup>2</sup> The Assembly of Divines at Westminster, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647).

<sup>3</sup> Albert Einstein, as quoted by John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2013). Preface.

<sup>4</sup> Source Unknown.