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THE GOAL THE GOSPEL: THE GLORY OF GOD

Romans 16:25-27

By

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Romans, Lesson 108

The Goal the Gospel: The Glory of God
Romans 16:25-27

How do you end a letter like Romans that has often been called the greatest letter ever written and the greatest book in the Bible? Normally, Paul ends his letters with a benediction, such as (1 Cor. 16:23), "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." (See the end of each of his letters.) He has already given such a benediction in Romans 16:20 (16:24 is probably not in the original text). So now, as he thinks back over what he has written, Paul wells up with praise toward God, who has provided such a glorious gospel for people from all nations.

The problem is, in his burst of emotion, Paul piles up phrase after phrase and doesn't supply a verb (in the original), so that the structure of the paragraph is difficult to decipher. I would not want the assignment of diagramming it! But many commentators observe that this short outburst of praise sums up all the great ideas of this epistle. William Sanday and Arthur Headlam (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [T. & T. Clark], p. 436) state,

The doxology sums up all the great ideas of the Epistle. The power of the Gospel which St. Paul was commissioned to preach; the revelation in it of the eternal purpose of God; its contents, faith; its sphere, all the nations of the earth; its author, the one wise God, whose wisdom is thus vindicated—all these thoughts had been continually dwelt on.

They go on to suggest that Paul wished to end the letter with its former loftiness and thus perhaps wrote these verses with his own hand, bringing his argument to this eloquent conclusion.

We saw a similar outburst of praise in Romans 11:33-36, as Paul thought on the glorious truths that he had been writing on:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS

FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

We saw there as we see here that the goal of theology is doxology. The goal of sound doctrine is a heart that overflows in praise to God. Paul reminds us in this conclusion that the goal of the gospel is not only our happiness. Certainly, we should be exuberant that God has rescued us from judgment and bestowed on us every blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). But our happiness is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal of the gospel is God's eternal glory. We can sum up our text:

The goal of the gospel is that we would glorify the only wise God through Jesus Christ as we live in obedient faith and proclaim Him to the nations.

As you know, the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." To glorify God, in simple language, is to make God look good as He truly is. J. Dwight Pentecost states (*The Glory of God* [Multnomah Press], p. 8), "Glory is displayed excellence." Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology* [Zondervan], p. 221) states that God's glory "is the visible manifestation of the excellence of God's character." Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Thomas Nelson Publishers], p. 165, italics his) puts it, "*God's glory is the sum total of all of his attributes as well as any one of his attributes.*" John Piper ("To Him be the Glory Forevermore," on DesiringGod.org, italics his) defines God's glory as, "The glory of God is *the infinite beauty and greatness of his manifold perfections.*"

This concept, that the ultimate goal of the gospel is not about us, but rather about God's glory, is a crucial and practical paradigm shift from the commonly held notion that the gospel is all about us. It affects, for example, our view of suffering. If the gospel is all about us and our happiness, then how do you deal with suffering and death, which aren't happy experiences? But if the gospel is not ultimately about our happiness, but rather about God's glory, then you can even face possible martyrdom as Paul did, with the goal that (Phil. 1:20) "Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

Of course, as John Piper has often pointed out, our happiness and God's glory are not at odds, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. And we are most satisfied in Him when we get a glimpse of His "infinite beauty and [the] greatness of His manifold perfections." Just as when you view a spectacular sunset at the Grand Canyon, you exclaim, "Wow!" so when you see the beauty and greatness of God, you spontaneously praise Him. That's the goal of the gospel.

Let's break our text into three parts:

1. To glorify God, we need to be established according to the gospel and live in obedient faith.

In other words, we need to believe the gospel and our faith must translate into a lifestyle of obedience to Christ in thought, word, and deed, so that others will see how great God is through us. We'll look at five aspects of being established in the gospel:

A. God has the power to establish us according to the gospel.

Romans 16:25a: "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel..." The gospel is the good news that while we were yet sinners, God graciously sent His only Son to bear the penalty that we deserved. He rescues us from sin and judgment when we turn from our sins and trust in Christ alone. Paul calls it "my gospel" not because his gospel was different than the gospel of Christ and the apostles, but because Paul had received the gospel through direct revelation from Christ (Gal. 1:11-15). Thus he was certain of its content and truth. The other apostles later confirmed Paul's gospel as authentic (Gal. 2:1-9).

He says that God is "able to establish you according to my gospel." Other literal versions translate "establish" with the word "strengthen." It originally meant to "fix something so that it stands upright and immovable" (Gunther Harder, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by G. Friedrich, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley [Eerdmans], 7:653). "The effect or aim of strengthening is the impregnability of Christian faith in spite of the troubles which have to be endured" (*ibid.*, 7:656). In view of Romans 16:17-20, it especially means being established so that you will not fall prey to false teachers (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], 2:240). C. E. B. Cranfield (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the*

Romans [T. & T. Clark], p. 809) says that it means that God is able "to confirm you in your belief in, in your obedience to, the gospel."

There are two sides to this strengthening or establishing us in the gospel. In Romans 1:11, Paul used this word to emphasize the human side of it: "For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established." Through Paul's ministry, he hoped that they would be established in the gospel. Peter uses the related noun ("steadfastness") also to put the emphasis on human responsibility (2 Pet. 3:17-18): "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." Peter is emphasizing the same truth, that as we are steadfast or established in the gospel and resist the errors of false teachers, God will be glorified.

But in Romans 16:25, Paul's emphasis is on the God-ward side of things: God is able to establish or strengthen us according to the gospel. As Paul puts it (Phil. 1:6), "*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Since it took God's resurrection power to raise us from spiritual death to life (Eph. 2:1-5), God is able to sustain and keep us so that our lives glorify Him.

Before you can be established according to the gospel you must have believed the gospel. Make sure that you have turned from your sins and trusted in Christ and His death on the cross as the only payment for your sins. This means repenting of trusting in your good works to contribute to your salvation. If you had anything to do with your salvation, then you have reason to boast in yourself. But there is no room for boasting if all you did was to receive an undeserved gift that God provided at Christ's expense. Once you have trusted in Christ, you never outgrow your need for the gospel. Meditate on it and let it warm your heart every day: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me"! Glory to God!

B. God establishes us through the preaching of Jesus Christ.

That phrase has two possible interpretations. It could mean that Christ is the one doing the preaching, either during His earthly ministry or through Paul. Or, more likely, it means that Jesus Christ is the one whom Paul preached. The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul said, "But we preach Christ crucified." In 2 Corinthians 4:5 he put it, "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake." In Colossians 1:28 Paul explained his ministry: "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."

Preaching Jesus Christ does not mean focusing on Christ to the exclusion of practical matters. In 1 Corinthians, where Paul said (2:2), "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," he went on to talk about how to deal with an immoral man in the church, lawsuits between believers, singleness, marriage, divorce, and many other practical topics. But in each practical area, Paul always brought things back to Jesus Christ as Lord. He didn't just dispense helpful hints for happy living that could easily have appeared in *Reader's Digest*. He related all matters to the gospel and to the lordship of Christ.

By the way, you don't have to be a preacher to "preach Christ." You should preach Christ to yourself as you read God's Word each day: "What does this text tell me about Jesus Christ and His lordship over my life? What does it tell me about His love, His grace, His authority, His holiness, or His promises?"

And if you get an opportunity to talk to others about the gospel, focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ. People will try to divert you onto side issues: "What about evolution? What about all the errors in the Bible? How can a loving God allow all the evil in the world?" Etc. I'm not suggesting that you totally dodge these questions, but don't get bogged down with them. At some point, turn the conversation back to Christ by asking, "Who do you think Jesus Christ is? Have you ever read the gospels to discover who Christ claimed to be and why He came to this earth? Have you considered the evidence that supports His bodily resurrection from the dead?" You can also ask, "If I can give you a reasonable answer to your questions, are you saying that you will turn from your sin,

put your trust in Jesus Christ, and follow Him as your Lord?" Jesus Christ is *the* issue everyone has to face!

- C. God establishes us according to the revelation of the mystery that has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested.

This phrase could refer to another means by which God establishes us, parallel with, "according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ." Or, it could be modifying those two phrases Murray, *ibid.*, p. 2:241). If so, by "the mystery" Paul is referring to the gospel, which God planned before the foundation of the world.

In the New Testament, "mystery" does not refer to something mysterious or to a puzzle that needs to be solved, but rather to something previously hidden that is now revealed. The problem is, if Paul is referring here to the gospel, then how it was kept secret for long ages past? After all, we see it in type when the Lord slaughtered an animal and clothed Adam and Eve after they sinned. The Lord prophesied about the gospel in Genesis 3:15, where He promised that the seed of the woman would bruise or crush the serpent's head. We again see it in promise when God tells Abraham that He will bless all the families of the earth through him. It's implicit in the story of God providing the ram as a substitute sacrifice before Abraham has to slay Isaac. It's pictured in the Jewish sacrificial system as set forth in the Law of Moses. So how was the gospel kept secret in long ages past?

There are perhaps two answers. First, even though we can now look back on these Old Testament texts and clearly see the gospel, it wasn't always so clear to the people then. They knew that God promised to send a Savior, but even the disciples who believed in Jesus as that Savior did not understand beforehand why He had to die (Matt. 16:21-23). Concerning the inspired writers of the Old Testament, 1 Peter 1:10-11 states, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." So in that sense, the gospel is "the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested." We can see it much more clearly looking back than they could looking forward.

But Paul may be referring to a further aspect of the gospel here, namely, that the message would go out to the Gentiles and that they would be on equal standing with the Jews in the body of Christ. Paul has stressed this truth throughout Romans, especially in chapters 9-11. The Old Testament reveals in many places that the gospel would go to the Gentiles, so that was not a mystery. But the Old Testament never reveals that through the gospel the Gentiles would be fellow-heirs on equal footing with the Jews. God revealed this mystery to the apostle Paul (Eph. 3:4-6). That aspect of the gospel was often a stumbling block to the racially proud Jews. But it's radically good news for the Gentiles. It strengthens and establishes us to know that God has given us equal standing with the Jews before Him through the gospel.

D. God establishes us by the Scriptures of the prophets.

This raises the question, "How could the gospel be kept secret in the ages past and at the same time be revealed by the Old Testament prophets?" The answer lies in the first aspect of the mystery that I just explained. There is a sense in which the gospel that we see clearly in the Old Testament on this side of Christ was in the shadows for those before Christ. It was in the prophets all along, but it didn't come into sharp focus until after the death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:25-27, 44-45).

The way that the Old Testament prophets establish us in the gospel is, as you read the Old Testament, look for Christ. Ask, "What does this text tell me about the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow?" (You can refer back to my message, "Why You Need the Old Testament," on Romans 15:4, for further detail.)

E. We know that God has established us in the gospel when we believe it and live in obedience to Jesus Christ.

The gospel leads to "obedience of faith." We saw this phrase in Romans 1:5, where Paul said that his aim as an apostle was "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake." Paul does not mean that we are saved by faith plus our works. That would be contrary to everything he wrote about the gospel in Romans 3 & 4. Rather, he means that genuine saving faith always results in a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. Jesus was clear that if we say, "Lord, Lord" and even do miracles in His

name, but don't obey Him, our faith is worthless (Matt. 7:21-23). James 2 makes the same point, that faith without works is dead faith, not saving faith. 1 John 2:3 plainly states, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments." Those who profess to know Christ, but who live in perpetual disobedience, do not glorify Him. To glorify God, we must be established according to the gospel and live in obedient faith.

2. To glorify God, we must proclaim His gospel to the nations.

Paul writes (16:26b), "according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations...." Although some understand "the commandment" here to refer to the Great Commission, it probably rather refers to "God's own determination to make known the mystery at the time that he did" (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 940). For reasons that we cannot fully know, before Christ came, God mostly restricted the gospel to His chosen people, the Jews. But after His resurrection, Christ commanded us to take the good news to the nations. Even then, the apostles were a bit leery of Peter going into the house of a Gentile centurion and preaching the gospel (Acts 10-11). But then God saved the militant Jew, Paul, and commissioned him as the apostle to the Gentiles.

When Paul says that the gospel "has been made known to all the nations," he is not saying that the missionary task has been completed. He has just stated how he aimed to go to Spain (15:24, 28). Rather, he is emphasizing "the universal applicability of the gospel" (Moo, *ibid.*). God is glorified when people from every tongue, tribe, and nation believe in and obey Jesus Christ. We all need to labor to that end.

3. The goal of the gospel is that we would glorify the only wise God through Jesus Christ forever.

Again Paul marvels at the wisdom of God, as he did in Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" When he says that God is "the only wise God," he is not implying that there are some dumb gods out there, too! He is the only God and He is infinitely wise. His plan of salvation is not something that men could have thought up. It is not the

composite of the best thoughts of all the religious geniuses down through the ages. We never could have come up with it on our own. Rather, God planned and revealed the gospel in accordance with His infinite wisdom to bring Him eternal glory through Jesus Christ.

Stephen Charnock discourses for over 100 pages on the wisdom of God from our text (*The Existence and Attributes of God* [Baker], 1:498-606). He observes (p. 502), "No man or angel could imagine how two natures so distant as the Divine and human should be united; how the same person should be criminal and righteous; how a just God should have a satisfaction, and sinful man a justification; how the sin should be punished, and the sinner saved." God's plan for the gospel reveals His infinite wisdom! Our eternal destiny is to worship and glorify God throughout the ages, so we had best start now.

Conclusion

Paul ends with "Amen," which means, "This is true," or "so be it." The message of Romans regarding the gospel of God (1:1, 16) is true. It reveals the wisdom of God. You can stake your life and your eternal destiny on it. The goal of the gospel is that we would glorify the only wise God through Jesus Christ as we live in obedient faith and proclaim Him to the nations. Amen! So be it!

Application Questions

1. What truth in Romans has most impacted your life? How?
2. Do you live each day with the prayer, "Lord, be glorified in my life today"? If not, what would you need to do to begin?
3. When you share the gospel, why is it important to stay focused on the person and work of Christ? How should you handle questions and objections?
4. What are some of the practical benefits of "preaching Christ" to yourself each day?

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