
Praying for the Gospel

Romans 16:25-27

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Introduction Where does God want us to be after hearing the gospel? When we hear:

- the awful condition of our hearts pointing out the dreadful judgment of God (Romans 1-3:20)
- the awesome cross of Christ providing a sacrifice for our sins and a righteousness for our standing (Romans 3:21-5:21)
- the awe-inspiring work of the Holy Spirit who overcomes our indwelling sin and makes us more than conquerors through the love of Christ (Romans 6-8)
- the breathtaking, humility-giving view of God's sovereign grace (Romans 9-11)
- how such sublime theology transforms and functions in relationships (Romans 12-16:23)

When we hear all wonder and splendor and brilliance of the Gospel, where does God want us to be? We come across the answer in Romans 16:25-27

Tonight's message is titled *Praying for the Gospel*. It centers on the desired effect the gospel needs to have in our lives and the lives of others. As we listen to the message tonight, attempt to complete the exhortation, "Let us be *Praying for the Gospel* that we will be where God wants us to be; namely _____. What effect, in other words, should the gospel have on our lives? What results should we see from us when the gospel is seen by us? The text for tonight will shape the answer. The three verses on which we will focus demonstrate the effect the gospel had on the Apostle Paul. <Read text>

A doxology

If you look at verses 25 through 27, you'll see a climactic word of praise from Paul. Here, Paul centers us on the goal of his gospel; namely a doxology to God's greatness. We with Paul need to be stunned by the gospel of God. It is precisely for this reason that we need to be *praying for the Gospel*. The gospel of God is on a discount rack in our generation. Man the sinner is dazzling and God the Savior is dull. Man is central. God is marginal. Man is important. God is not. With piercing insight David Wells said of our culture; "It is this God, majestic and holy in his being, this God whose love knows no bounds because his holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world."¹ It is vital that

¹ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p.300.

we *pray for the Gospel* that it will have the effect on us as we see it had on Paul. In vv.25-27, Paul is in a doxology over the greatness of God.

Before we work through these verses, let's think together on what a doxology is. A doxology is from us to God. It is the desired effect the gospel is to have on us. Having received from God it is our response to God. It is usually found at the end of a book (as we see it here; see also Jude 24-25) or at the end of a discourse (as we see it in Rom.11:33). A doxology is not to be confused with a benediction which is God's blessing upon us. Rather, a doxology is God's people giving praise or glory to God. The movement of a doxology is not from God to us. It is from us to God. A doxology usually begins with, "blessed are you...", "Praise be to you [him]; or like we see in our text for tonight "To Him who...". The focus in a doxology is giving to God praise due His excellent attributes.

To notice the effect the gospel is to have on us; to understand what it is that we must be praying for when we are *praying for the gospel*, let's break down this doxology into its five essential parts.

There are at least five parts to this doxology.

1. It is a gospel-producing praise to the mighty God.
2. It is a gospel-producing praise to the only wise God.
3. It is a gospel-producing praise to the eternal God.
4. It is a gospel-producing praise to Him through Jesus Christ.
5. And it is all to the glory of God.

Let's look at this gospel-producing doxology together.

to the mighty God

V.25a

The first part you see in the words, "Now to him who is able." Those words show us the might of God. They show us the mighty God. They draw attention to the power of God. "To Him who is able..." able to do what? For Paul, the answer is personal and powerful. He was encountered by this power some twenty years prior to writing the letter to the Romans. Before the power of God; the gospel, came crashing into his life, he was a self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-righteous leader in Judaism. He considered himself to be an asset to God as he aimed to squelch a new sect called The Way (or Christianity). He was persecuting those who followed this supposed resurrected Messiah. In Acts 9 we come across Paul's first taste of the power of God through the gospel. Knocked down from his arrogant position and blinded by light from heaven his whole world was turned upside down. His entire world view crashed before him. He needed instruction. He needed explanations. He needed forgiveness and a gift-righteousness to replace his works-righteousness. Ananias, a man sent by God to give Paul the Truth, came to him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. (You will be an instrument of Jesus' to carry His name before the Gentiles...and He will

show you how much you must suffer for the sake of His reputation) Paul arose, was baptized and he was strengthened (see Acts 9:1-19).

The almighty God tore him down in order to build him up by His strength through the gospel. Paul praised the Lord and proclaimed the Christ immediately. He was not ashamed of the gospel; for it was the power of God for the salvation of all who believed (Rom.1:16). Paul preached the gospel and grew in strength (Acts 9:20-22) knowing that he would undergo suffering and persecution for it.

Paul leaned heavily upon “Him who is able to strengthen [him]”. For two decades he faced “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, dishonor, slander, treated as impostor; unknown and yet well known, as dying yet living, as punished yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing everything (2Cor.6:4ff).

Eighteen months or so prior to writing Rom.16:25 he thought he might be dying. And he gave a gospel-produced doxology: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”. The effect the gospel had on him personally produced this type of doxology. His sufferings burdened him beyond his strength so that he would “rely not on himself but on Him who raises the dead” (2Cor.1).

The first part of this doxology comes from a perception of and a participation in the power of God in the gospel of God.

to the only wise God

vv.25b-27

The wisdom of God is the second thing that we see in this doxology. Paul is acknowledging, and indeed glorying, in the wisdom of God's plan. That plan is set forth in verses 25 and 26. We are strengthened according to Paul's gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages past but is now manifested. In other words, Paul is saying that the gospel that he has proclaimed is about a redemptive event that was in the mind of God from eternity past, but was only revealed fully in Jesus Christ. Yes, the Scriptures of the prophets had witnessed to it, he makes that clear in verse 26, but, it had not fully been revealed, it couldn't fully be understood except in Jesus Christ.

The people of God, through the gospel of God, looked at Jesus Christ and said, "Oh, now I understand what that passage in Isaiah 53 means (see Acts 8:32ff). Now I understand what that passage in Jeremiah 31- 32 mean. Now I understand what Psalm 118 and what Psalm 110 and what Psalm 2 means. Now I'm starting to see all that God has done in Jesus Christ throughout Moses and all the Prophets (see Lk.24:27).

In our passage tonight, Paul says that we see in God's redemptive plan centered on Christ the wisdom of God revealed. We never would have guessed this plan. Through the wisdom of man, we never would have figured it out (see 1Cor.1-2) If you had asked somebody to sit down in the days of Abraham and say, "explain the whole counsel of God to me (cf. Acts 20:27) "what's the plan of God going to be?" nobody would have said "Well, here's how it's going to happen. God is going to send His only begotten Son into the world. He's going to be incarnated. He's going to die in our place bring peace to the Jews and the Gentiles. He's going to assume our guilt and our sin. He's going to bear that sin and guilt on our behalf.

He's going to die. He's going to be buried. He's going to be raised again from the dead. He's going to ascend on high and send His Spirit. He's going to judge the living and the dead. He's going to take us with Him. And His kingdom will have no end. "

The effect the gospel had on Paul as he contemplated the depths of the wisdom of God in the plan of God was a heart-pounding doxology. Listen to the Apostle after he had contemplated the Sovereign plan and grace of God. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgment and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever. Amen" (cf. Rom11:33ff).

God's redemptive plan centered on Christ makes plain the wisdom of God. Where did God want Paul to be after he had personally experienced God's power and God's plan? We find Paul in vv.25-27 in the place God wants us to be. Paul was in doxology.

to the eternal God

vv.25b-27

The phrase "The eternal God" seen in the last part of v.26 is the third thing we see in this doxology. Paul is utterly gripped by the sixteen chapters he just dictated. The fullest, grandest, most comprehensive statement of the gospel brought Paul into praise. Pondering the wisdom of this full-orbed view of God's plan prompted him to allude to the eternity of God. This plan in vv.25-26 wasn't thought up after the Fall. Adam and Eve did not blow it and thus cause God to formulate another plan. The last few words in v.25 "long ages" point us to conclude that this plan was an eternal plan. And this eternal plan was in the mind of the eternal God.

Can we fathom that? There was never a time when God wasn't. He always was and is and will be. He was there before we came. He will be there when we are gone. The God who gives you life and breath this very moment never had a beginning. The sheer eternal existence of the Triune God brought Paul to doxology. What else was he to say and do in front of this great God?

The all-wise plan of God to create galaxies and gardens; lightening and lightning bugs; comets and kids; is an eternal plan. The all-wise plan of God is outside time and cannot be altered by man. This plan defines all existence; all beauty and glory and all evil and pain. This plan to create the Universe and then redeem His rebellious people from their sin was an eternal plan of God. When he made us we had no say in the matter. When He redeemed us we went just along with His eternal plan. We do not shape this eternal plan. This eternal plan shapes us. The gospel which gripped the Apostle Paul and produced this doxology by him never had a beginning.

through Jesus Christ

v.27b

Are we beginning to see why we must be *praying for the gospel* that it will have the effect upon us as it did in Paul? He saw so much in the gospel that his response to the gospel was doxology. Let us be *praying for the Gospel* that we will be where God wants us

to be. And where does God want us to be after hearing the gospel? He wants us to be where we see Paul in these verses; namely in doxology.

But Paul is not finished yet. He sees more in the gospel that causes him praise. This praise to God comes through a mediator. His name is Jesus Christ. The gospel is not a system whereby we understand certain things and then make changes for our betterment. The gospel is not merely a plan. It is a person. In v.25, Paul said that his gospel is the preaching of Jesus Christ. All the teaching of Rom.1-3:20 on the awful condition of our hearts and the dreadful judgment of God is to position us in a hopeless place. Desperate for mercy we come to Romans 3:21-5:21 and hear of the awesome cross of Christ providing a sacrifice for our sins and a righteousness by faith alone. We are introduced to our Sovereign and Savior Jesus Christ. This divine being is the culmination of the gospel. He is the One who carried out this eternal plan. He is the mediator between God and man. What He purchased on the cross as seen in Romans 3:21-16:23 is breathtaking. We are to receive all he gave by faith and then we are to worship all He is by praise. Hearing the gospel is to bring us to a place the same as the apostle Paul. We are to be in doxology over Jesus Christ our Lord!

to the glory of God

v.27

Paul ends this thirteen page, astounding defense of the gospel in adoration. He ends this book in praise. This is the only fitting response to the doctrines of grace that are set forth in the book of Romans. The reason why I'm preaching the message *praying for the gospel* is that we are not like this. Our imagination is not captured by the grand themes of the Bible. We hear the gospel and then say "what's for lunch today?" We read about the mighty, all-wise, eternal God and then say, "my shoes are killing me today". We look at the whole landscape of Jesus Christ in the Bible opened to view and then say, "Did you hear who won the baseball game today?"

Beloved, we must be *praying for the gospel* that it will have its effect upon us like it had its effect upon Paul. We must be *praying for the gospel* that we will be where God wants us to be. And where he wants us to be is in doxology!

Conclusion

The end of this message is the end of this passage. Paul comes to the end of this book by coming to the end for which God gave us the gospel; namely to the glory of Himself. And how do we see Him glorifying Himself?

- We see in Rom.1:20f that God's aim in creating the word was to display the value of his own glory.
- We see in Rom.1:23 that we all fail miserably in treasuring the value of His glory. Rather we exchange His breathtaking glory for some fleeting, infinitely inferior substitute. Romans 3:23 says that we are all sinners!
- And yet, we see in Rom.3:21-5:21 that God crucified Christ in order to uphold His justice as He justifies the unjust by faith in Him alone. What a mystery! What a mercy! He gives us the capacity to see that the gospel was made not

for our felt needs. We were made to realize and relish the gospel's infinite worth. The soul-satisfying glory of God in the gospel ends our treasure hunt.

- ☞ We begin to understand in Romans 6-8 that this soul-satisfying glory of God in the gospel is the power of a new affection to break us free from the bondage of sin.
- ☞ And as we continue to travel over the landscape of the gospel we come to Romans 9-11 and see that the enjoyment of this fullness of gladness in God was planned for us before we ever existed.
- ☞ We partner with each other in local church relationships and disciple each other so that we will not lose sight of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ (Rom.12-16). Why does He do all this for unworthy people like you and me? He loves His glory by loving us with His grace! What a gospel.

Therefore, we close tonight the way we started tonight. If David Wells is correct in saying that this almighty, all-wise, all-glorious God has disappeared from American Christianity, if the gospel has been marginalized by man becoming dazzled with himself and becoming bored with God, if this is the diagnosis of our culture what is at stake? It is not merely a healthy society in which crime rate and poverty decrease and community service and economics increase; it is not merely healthy relationships by which the divorce rate decreases and loving homes are on the rise. When the gospel of God appears monotonous the magnificence of God disappears. When the magnificence of God disappears, people are made much of and God gets overlooked.

How does God re-emerge and become conspicuous and compelling? Tonight's premise can be summed up like this.

Tonight's Premise

Stunning theology around us is to produce singing doxology from us.

But the sheer fact of the matter is it doesn't. We are not stunned by the wonder and beauty and magnificence of God in the gospel. We are not captured by the breathtaking, humility giving sovereign grace. We are not relishing in Truth because we are recognizing it as such. (Ps.119:18; Eph.1:18ff)

And so, when we are reading the gospel and hearing the gospel and studying the gospel and memorizing the gospel and sharing the gospel, let us:

Tonight's Point

Be praying for the gospel that we will be in doxology.