

Prayer for Gospel Obedience

Romans 16:25-27

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Introduction

Have you ever considered how the Gospel impacts prayer?

Have you ever thought about the basis and foundation for prayer, what we should pray for, and what our priorities in prayer should be? I think this really hit me the first time I picked up D.A. Carson's book on Paul's prayers called, "A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers." This book is the basis on which this series on prayer is built. But it wasn't until I picked up this book a number of years ago that I even thought about praying any differently than I was. When I was young I was taught that prayer is based on a personal relationship with Christ (which it is). But so much of the time when I pray it is about me and what I want. Sure, I was taught the (ACTS) model of prayer (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication), which was helpful because it did teach me the various aspects of prayer found in scripture. Now when I pray, I don't always include every aspect of that model, but they are found in my prayer life as a whole. Sometimes I might only praise God, other times I might only petition God, or express my gratefulness and gratitude to God. Very often my prayer is simply, "Lord, be glorified with my life today". My prayer is typically conversational and typically throughout the day (as opposed to a set time or place or pattern). I don't necessarily pray very long at any one time, and sometimes I feel like I am wrestling with God because I am pleading so hard with God. And pleading is not necessarily because I want what I want, but often it is because I am actually praying scripture over my life and others. Wrestling and pleading with God is simply a natural expression of my sincerity and a deep desire and confidence in my prayer relationship with God. I am sincere and I deeply desire what I pray for, but other than that there is nothing "special" about my prayer. Prayer helps me have the confidence to remember that God is sovereign, and no matter what God allows in my life, no matter what I pray for or desire, God will always work his plan out for my good and His glory.

I think is important to personalize scripture and turn scripture into prayer. Take any scripture and turn it into a prayer for yourself, the church, your flock, family and friends who need prayer; because you can be assured that you are praying God's will over the lives you care the most about. God promises to answer our prayers based on his will for us, which is clearly reflected in scripture. Scripture also helps us align our priorities in prayer, and therefore we know when we pray scripture appropriately that our prayers will be answered. D.A. Carson in the above mentioned book says, *Mingle praise, confession, and intercession; but when you intercede, try to tie as many requests as possible to Scripture.* Carson, D. A. (1992). *A call to spiritual reformation: priorities from Paul and his prayers* (p. 29). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

My prayer for us is that through this series and through this prayer in Romans we will have a better understanding about what our priorities should be in prayer. Because what I have discovered is often what God's priorities are for us are vastly different from what we ask for in prayer. This series

was designed to show us biblical priorities in prayer, and tonight we want to look at the importance of praying for gospel obedience and how the gospel actually helps us understand prayer better.

Let's pray.

The Theological Basis for This Prayer –Strength to Obey through the Gospel

Today we are looking at Romans 16:25-27, which is actually a doxology or conclusion to the letter of Romans. A doxology is literally an expression of, or liturgical (worship) formula for praise. Although intended for praise, a doxology is intentional in its use of both praise and its pattern of prayer. Paul uses this doxology in Romans to review and conclude the major themes of Romans with an emphasis on God's glory and a focus on finding the strength to obey the gospel in everyday life.

An interesting aspect of this doxology is that it parallels Paul's introduction in his letter where he lays out the letter's important themes. In the New Bible Commentary, the editors write, *Paul's doxology, in addition to concluding the letter on a high note of ascription of glory to God, also effectively sums up some of the key themes of the letter. Paul's defense and explanation of the gospel that he preaches is, we have suggested, the central theme of the letter. Paul now reminds us that it is by means of that gospel that God 'establishes' us in our faith.*" (NBC: 21st Century Edition, p.1160)

So, the gospel is not only vital to our salvation but also vital to our prayer life in establishing us in our faith.

Comparing Romans 1:1-5 to Romans 16:25-27

Having bookends in the letter to Romans raises the importance of the subject matter about which Paul writes in Romans, and as with any conclusion we want to understand the context of what took place in the book. In this situation we want to look at the parallel emphasis that Paul brings out from the very beginning of the book to its conclusion.

The over-arching theme of Romans can be found in verses 1:16-17 (in the New Living Translation); *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"* The key theme of Romans is the gospel and how we are saved through faith. However salvation doesn't end with simply accepting Christ through faith. Faith produces an obedience that allows us to serve Christ as servants (literally slaves), and through living both faith and obedience we will bring glory to God in our everyday lives.

In Paul's opening comments to the Romans he outlines key subjects in his letter which are closely reflected in the doxology as well. I really like the sentence structure in Romans 1:1-5 in the New Living Translation, it reads, *"This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name."* (Romans 1:1-5)

Now listen to the doxology at the end of Romans.

The Romans Doxology (Romans 16:25-27)

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.

Hear the similarities and connected themes?

I put the major themes together on the overhead and you can see the similarities.

Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote this letter so he feels it is important to establish his credentials in the introduction, as well as plainly and richly explaining what the gospel is. The gospel first of all is from God. It is not a man-made belief system or religion, but handed down from God. The gospel was promised through his prophets from the very beginning of time. The gospel was never plan B, or a second thought on God's part. God's plan of salvation has been in scripture from the very beginning, but since Christ's resurrection, it is more clearly revealed to all. The gospel is about Christ and fulfilled in Christ, and therefore the true gospel does not move away from Christ in any way. God's good news is about Jesus. As Luther put it, "Here the door is thrown wide open for the understanding of Holy Scripture, that is, everything must be understood in relation to Christ" (The Message of Romans, John R. W. Stott, pg. 49).

The doxology repeats these themes with an even greater emphasis on Christ's wisdom and glory, which is only fitting for such a grand and full description of the gospel as we have in Romans. Paul reminds us in the doxology that to move away from Christ is to move away from the gospel. The gospel cannot be unhinged from Christ.

All Glory to God (v. 25)

Listen as I read the doxology in the New Living Translation (NLT), "Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen."

In the introduction of Romans, Paul writes, "for the sake of his name,". Now Paul begins and ends his doxology with, "Now all glory to God." This prayer of praise begins and ends with giving glory to God. After the richness of the gospel has been fully explained to the Romans to wrap up his letter Paul emphasizes giving glory to God.

In our own prayers, it is vital that we begin and end our praises and prayer with giving God all of the glory. I do not necessarily mean, literally begin and end every prayer by saying, "give glory to God", but the whole focus and posture of our prayer life should be one of "giving God glory". In fact, there is no greater reason or cause for our prayer, praise, evangelism or discipleship than bringing glory to Christ's name. If you never pray anything more than "God please use my life today to bring

glory to you and your name", you will likely have already improved your prayer and praise posture in your heart towards God. God does use prayer to teach and change us, and just understanding that prayer is as much for us as it is towards God will alone change our attitude about prayer and its outcome. Otherwise, Paul would not have put such clarity of the gospel in his concluding prayer.

God is Able to Strengthen You (v. 25)

In Romans chapter 1, Paul wrote, "...Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations..." In chapter 1 Paul recognized that grace was necessary to bring about the obedience of faith in believers. He knew that his work would bring glory to God through preaching the gospel to all nations. Now Paul concludes in Romans 16:25, that it is not only him who has received the grace necessary to preach and obey the gospel, but God is able to strengthen all of us through the gospel. And we are supposed to both pray for and praise God for the strength necessary to both believe and obey the gospel.

Strengthening Through the Gospel (v. 25)

God is able to strengthen you (make you strong) according to (on the authority of; or in agreement with) the gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ. The over-arching strengthening agent in this prayer is God strengthening his people through the preaching and teaching of the gospel. God uses the gospel message to establish and strengthen his people. But in order to be strengthened we need to hear the gospel, by sitting under the teaching and preaching of the gospel on a regular basis.

If faith in Christ comes through hearing the word of God, how will we gain knowledge and strength if we are not in a place to hear the gospel being preached? How often do we pray for strength in our daily life and fail to pursue the gospel message in our reading, or fail to sit under the preaching of the gospel? God is able to strengthen the believer towards obeying the gospel, though the reading and preaching of the good news about Christ. It is through the hearing of the gospel that the believer is strengthened and established in the faith. Nowhere in scripture is the believer unattached from the church, from other believers, or from sitting under the preaching of God's word. Failing to sit under the preaching of the gospel on a regular basis is simply not an option for the growing believer.

Authority of the Gospel (v. 25)

The strength that we receive from God is based on the authority of the gospel message as a direct command from God. The gospel is authoritative and based on the story of Christ from ages past. The story about the coming Messiah has always been present in history, but no one fully understood what God was doing until Christ appeared, when God openly revealed His plan of salvation to the apostles, disciples of Christ, both Jew and Gentile from all nations and now to us. The message of gospel begins with the Old Testament prophets and writings, and was fulfilled in the person of Christ himself. We understand that the gospel story encompasses all of scripture from the earliest writings to latest. And by hearing and believing the gospel story we receive faith to believe in Christ and accept his salvation, and we also receive the strength to obey and remain faithful to God's commands.

God's Purpose for Strengthening the Believer (v.26)

Christ strengthens us in order that we might be established and obedient in our faith. The whole purpose of strengthening the believer is to increase our faith, which will lead to a greater obedience to Christ and the scripture, which will ultimately lead to more faith. So Christ is not only our savior, but he is also to be our Lord, and God not only gives us faith to believe the gospel message when we believe, confess and are saved, but he gives us grace to have the faith to obey what God desires.

Summary

According to John Stott in his book, "The Message of Romans," Paul takes the central themes of Romans, summarizes them and relates them to each other. First, in verse 25, there is the power of God. The power of God not only is able to save us, but also to establish our faith through the gospel, strengthening the believer in "truth, holiness and unity." God is able to establish you, literally "according to" *the proclamation of Christ*. "...Paul is affirming that God's power to establish the church is part of his gospel...." The gospel is not only a saving message but a sustaining and strengthening message...a true means of grace. So, what does this mean in real life?

The gospel will help you know and understand what God's will is for your life and give you the strength to obey the gospel message. You will not only understand and be assured of your salvation but you can also know what pleases God, and will have the strength to obey what you hear in scripture. Hearing the gospel on a consistent basis will strengthen your faith and make you strong and able to stand against temptation and trial. The older I become in the faith, the more value and dependence I find I have on the gospel message, not merely the teachings of scripture, but truly the gospel message about the person and work of Christ himself! Because without the work of Christ in our lives we are truly nothing but vessels destined for destruction.

In the second part of verse 25, it reads, "...according to the revelation of the mystery", emphasizing the fact that the gospel is revealed truth. The story of the gospel message has always been present in biblical history but has now been revealed in the person of Christ himself. Christ is the full and completed message of salvation and reconciliation. *"Thus the mystery begins, continues and ends with Christ"* (Stott, pg. 404).

In the first part of verse 26, Paul writes of the evangelization of the nations, which Paul describes in his doxology as hidden, revealed and now made known, (*"kept secret for long ages, ...now disclosed and made known"*). The mystery of including all people into God's kingdom has now been made known and fulfilled through the life, death, resurrection and exultation of Jesus. This is truly good news that is being made throughout history and throughout the world. God's word and will have already been revealed through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations would not only believe in Christ but also obey him. *"Both the introduction to Romans (1:1-5) and the doxology refer to the Scriptures, the commission of God to evangelize, and the obedience of faith, and all the nations."* (Stott, pg. 405)

The purpose statement of Christ strengthening the believer in the second half of verse 26, might be translated...*to bring about the obedience of faith, to believe and obey him*. This wording is identical to the purpose of verse 1:5. John Stott writes, *"The proper response to the gospel is faith, as Paul has addressed throughout his letter, but it is faith which itself is obedient and which issues in a life*

of obedience." Paul concludes his prayer at the end of Romans with, "to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ..." "God's wisdom is seen in Christ himself..." God chose to save the world, not through the world's wisdom, but through the foolishness of the cross. Ultimately Christ will unite people from every nation, culture and race into a people glorifying himself through obedience and faithfulness. Obedience and faithfulness which was always and will forever be because of God's wisdom and His grace alone, and of no strength or purpose of man. Why wouldn't all the wisdom and glory be fully assigned to Christ, in both salvation and the daily faith he gives us to please him in this life?

Reflect and Respond

How should our praying be changed in relation to this prayer? What do you pray for?

- Is God getting the glory, praise and adoration in your prayers?
- Are you praying scripture and biblical truth in your prayers?
- Do we pray with a satisfaction and dependency on God's sovereignty and wisdom?
- Do we ask that God be glorified in our lives no matter what our circumstances, or whether our prayer is answered the way we want it be answered or not?
- Are we praying that we would be faithful and obedient to the gospel?
- Are we praying that we might be strengthened and established in our faith through the gospel?
- Are we praying that we might be instrumental in proclaiming the gospel to those who have not heard the story about Christ?
- Have we done the work necessary to understand what God's will is for us in prayer, by listening and reading and understanding the gospel message?

Conclusion:

"It is fair to say that the major themes of Paul's letter are encapsulated in the doxology; the power of God to save and to establish; the gospel and the mystery, once hidden and now revealed, which are Christ crucified and risen; the Christ-centered witness of the Old Testament Scripture; the commission of God to make the good news universally known; the summons to all the nations to respond with obedience of faith, and the saving wisdom of God, to whom all glory is due for ever." (Stott, JRW, Romans p. 406)

Who would have thought that the gospel is just as vital to our prayers and the establishment of our faith as it is to our salvation?

Let's pray



Title
Text
Speaker

The Chapel Pulpit • <date> Sunday Morning

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Heading

➤ **Heading**

Heading

Conclusion