
The Gospel: Doxology for a Heavenly People

Romans 16:25-27

How do we like to think about Jesus? Are we moved by His humanity? Do pictures of Him in a dusty robe, sandals, beard, piercing eyes and a small group of followers warm our hearts? He was (and is) a true man. He wore our humanity. He suffered, thirsted, hungered. He probably had colds, headaches and blisters on his hands from his hammer. And this may be a needful emphasis.

But there is also a danger – a danger that we will focus on the humanity of Christ as a babe in the manger with all sorts of tender, but speculative sentiments that draw out worship for Jesus' humanity. Yes, he was truly man, truly human. He took on human clay and veiled His glory. But we do not worship the humanity of Christ – we worship Christ in His deity. The worship that is fueled during this season ought to be wonder at the amazing condescension of the Lord Jesus – that He, infinite, eternal, unchanging Deity should become one of us, except without our sin.

The New Testament tends to focus on Christ in this different way. That is, it does not ignore the reality of a human birth as a baby, while it emphasizes over and over again the holiness of His life and the meaning of His death and resurrection. The birth is seen as a means for Jesus, the Son of God, to become human. Even the taking on of humanity *is seen in redemptive and ruling categories*.

So it will be a helpful corrective for us to ponder and savor the significance of the gospel in the doxology that closes 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.

For His Work

(v.25)

The doxology – the worship form – worships God for His work. It opens like two others in the New Testament.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21, ESV)

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, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

So God is honored in this praise for His power and wisdom. This is the essence of the book of Romans. The gospel is the power of God and the wisdom of God. So what we know to be true of God drives and shapes our worship.

In His Person

God is one who is able to strengthen us. He is this kind of God. He is invested with *du-namis*, with power. He is not a God who is dependent upon the choices and whims of man. Through His ordained means, He moves with sovereign authority and ability to accomplish what His wisdom has designed and His will has determined.

In its Power

The work of God here is a strengthening for stability. While the gospel is the power of God for salvation in Romans 1:5-7, here it is the power of God for stability. The word means “to put or place something firmly in its location.” What is needed is strength to withstand the temptations to sin and to cling to Christ and not be moved from the confession of our faith nor its assurance. So, this is not a precept to be strong, but a promise of strength. Our powerful God promises to establish us in our faith.

In its Preaching

That strength for stability comes according to my gospel, which is the preaching of Christ. So God’s power given as strength does not come directly like rain from heaven, but like electricity through a wire. There is a conduit, a means through which that strength comes. Now, I detect two ideas here.

The gospel establishes the expectation and standard for that strength. Understand this – Paul is not concerned about physical strength, but rather about spiritual stamina. So we should expect a cross, resurrection and glory rhythm to God’s work in us. How do we know that?

The gospel is primarily the proclamation of Jesus Christ. It is about how the Messiah Jesus, through His death, resurrection and glorious rule brings to fulfillment what the Old Testament promised and prophesied. The focus is on Jesus. Further, the focus is on Jesus *pro-claimed*.

The focus on Jesus here is not on some subjective relationship from which we draw strength. Rather, as we hear truth about Him and therefore see Him by the eyes of faith, the very power of God flows into our inner being to sustain us. We must be careful to be proclaiming the gospel that Paul preached. There are other “gospels” out there that are no true gospel. I love Paul’s ownership of it here – it is “my gospel.” While we cannot own it in the same apostolic way, we can certainly embrace it in a very personal way.

So the gospel, the preaching, the *kerygma*, of Christ is not just the power of God for salvation by faith, but also the power of God to stand firm. This is why you will hear the gospel here all the time – we will in all our preaching bring Christ to you so that you will be brought to Christ. This is why I am deeply concerned that the whole Bible is preached in such a way that it shows the contours of the greatness of Christ and how that topography maps out over your life.

For His Wisdom

This is why then we worship God for His wisdom. Thomas Schreiner summarizes this section of the doxology this way, “The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed by Paul fulfills what the OT Scriptures predicted.” (*Romans*, T. Schreiner, p.813) The challenge for me this morning is not to miss the importance of the details of God’s wisdom while not bogging us down in theological word play so that we are distracted from worship. So it is my aim to show you the exquisite wisdom of God for a moment and then throw it like gasoline on the fire of your worship.

Its Redemptive Development

(v.25b-26a)

The preaching of Jesus Christ is the revealing of a mystery. What was once hidden is being disclosed *now*. The operative word here is now. The fullness of all that God is for us in Jesus the Messiah was not uncovered in the past. It was a mystery. It was true, but the redemptive clock had not reached the high noon of the cross and resurrection. So there is a redemptive historical development – a progression in the revelation of who the Messiah is and the scope of His worth, words and work. So there were lambs in the Old pointing to the Lamb. There were tabernacles and Temples pointing to Jesus Christ our Temple. There were priests who ministered imperfectly the perfection of our great High Priest. There was a people of God who were largely of one ethnic background, one culture with a strictly ordered life pointing to Jesus, in whom the people of God are from all people groups with a rich life of grace and freedom on holiness. The point is that we must now live in the riches all that we know of Christ now.

And so 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 says,

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (ESV)

The exquisite wisdom of God is unveiled in progressive glory as the river of time flows from the glory of the future into the words and works of the past.

Its Biblical Hermeneutic**(v.26)**

Our worship of God in His wisdom is also shaped by its Biblical Hermeneutic. The glory of Jesus' is most fully seen and savored when we come to the Bible the way the Bible explains itself. Here is a fundamental principle – the Old Testament can only be correctly interpreted and fully appreciated by the people of God on the resurrection side of the cross.

Notice what this sentence (actually, clause) is saying: the mystery is now revealed in preaching Christ because it was hidden, kept secret in the past and is now disclosed being made known through the prophetic writings. So, the person and work of Jesus Christ were in the Old Testament, hidden particularly in the prophetic books, but now that He has come and inaugurated the fulfillment, we read the Old Testament and see what no Old Testament person could have ever seen. In other words, we read the Old Testament as Christians, not as Israelites. We still need to be sure that we get the words and sentences and paragraphs right – but what they are pointing to is Jesus in all that He is and all that He brings about.

So, once again the principle articulated by Schreiner, “The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed by Paul fulfills what the OT Scriptures predicted.” The translator of Calvin’s Commentaries says, “Their value to the Jew was very different from that to the Christian. To the former they were the highest revelation attainable, while for us they do not reveal a single attribute or purpose of Deity which is not more fully made known through the Gospel dispensation. The Hebrew visions stand to us in the relation of porch to temple, and of dawn to day.... They were especially appropriate to the people to whom they were bestowed, and of a structure and material in accordance with the dispensation to which they ministered. They were prefigurative and preformative throughout. They were preparatory and thus far excellent, but not “chiefest of all” because not permanent. Like the scaffolding, the growing blade, the finished portrait, they fail in comparison with the state-ly building, the ripened corn, the living person.⁴

Thus Paul writes the following in Colossians 1:25-28.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (ESV)

The mystery that was kept secret has now been made known to all the people groups through the prophetic writings. So the gospel has now moved outward to all the people groups. Now that we know that is true, you can see it all over the Old Testament. Paul clearly in much of his writing interprets the Old Testament with a “to the Jew and Gentile

⁴John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Ezekiel*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).

in Christ as the church” hermeneutic. Why? Because this is the will (or command) of God. The point here is not that we are commanded to preach – we are, but that is not Paul’s point here. Paul’s point here is that this Christ-centered preaching and hermeneutic *was designed and determined by God*. This is not a personal innovation on Paul’s part. That it was kept secret and now is disclosed is not a weakness of the Scripture, but rather the wonder of God’s wisdom.

Its Glorious Aim

(v.26c)

Why is this? Because God has designed by His wisdom that His work would bring about the obedience of faith. When Christ is proclaimed, from Old Testament through New Covenant contours, then the gospel accomplishes what it was purposed to do – produce obeying faith in all of God’s people from all over the world during all this age. Paul had aimed his own life and ministry along this trajectory (Romans 1:5-6) because God had purposed this very aim for the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, we ought to glorify God for His great wisdom. He has, with superb skill unfolded with ever-increasing clarity the greatness of His love for Christ and for us in Christ. At the center of this is Jesus, coming in the incarnation – born as a baby, living as a man, dying as lamb, rising as the Lord and ruling as the King. And all like a hidden treasure buried in the Old Testament and unearthed and placed on public display in Scriptures.

Thomas Schreiner captures this for us so well as he writes, “As Paul meditates on God’s ability to establish believers so that they persevere in the faith to the end, he gives God the glory because he deserves the credit for the perseverance of believers. Such perseverance has its roots in the power of the gospel, which centers on the person of Jesus Christ, Paul praises God because at this juncture of history he has unveiled them mystery of the gospel, which was hidden from previous generations but has now been eschatologically manifested and revealed through Jesus Christ. It is now God’s will or ‘command’ that this gospel be disseminated among all peoples, so that they will experience the obedience that flows from faith.” (*Romans*, Schreiner, p. 815).

For His Worth

At the end of the day, God’s work and wisdom flow out of the immeasurable worth of His glory.

In His Supremacy

He is supremely “God only wise.” All the idols of human invention and imagination are dirty used carbons in contrast to the stunning wisdom of the one God. Thus God is supreme – both in the grandness of His planning and in the greatness of His power. He dwells alone in solitary wisdom stretching out from eternity to eternity through time the awful beauty of the intricate weaving of His works, showing forth His Son in breathtaking display.

Through His Son

God determined to magnify Himself, to bring glory to Himself *through Jesus Christ*. The supreme glory of God is His Son for “He is the radiance of the glory of God” (Hebrews 1:3, ESV). Though the glory of God may be seen in lesser lenses – creation, His people, His

eternal benefits – all of these are telescopes through which the greater glory of God through Jesus Christ is to be seen now from a distance and face to face throughout eternity.

So this is why we can celebrate the coming of Christ and why we must never stop there. In His birth he took on a human body, forever. In His resurrection, that body was glorified, ascended and seated in eternal ruling session in heaven from whence He will come again some day. And the Ancient of Days will stand and raise His mighty arm and time will be no more and before His glorious Son every knee will bow. Amen!

Reflect and Respond

One expositor concluded, “The major themes of [Romans] 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 Old Testament Scripture; the commission of God to make the good news universally known; the summons to all the nations to respond with the obedience of faith and the saving wisdom of God, to whom all glory is due forever.” (*Romans*, Stott, p.406).

Your Father clasps You evermore
 In unspeakable embraces,
 While angels tremble as they praise,
 And shroud their dazzled faces.
 And Oh! In what abyss of love,
 So fiery yet so tender,
 The Holy Ghost encircles You
 With His uncreated splendor!
 O Word! O dear and gentle Word!
 Your creatures kneel before You,
 And in ecstasies of timid love
 Delightedly adore You.

Hail choicest mystery of God!
 Hail wondrous Generation!
 The Father’s self-sufficient rest!
 The Spirit’s jubilation!
 Dear Person! Dear beyond all words,
 Glorious beyond all telling!
 O with what songs of silent love
 Our ravished hearts are swelling!
 O marvelous! O worshipful!
 No song or sound is heard,
 But everywhere and every hour,
 In love, in wisdom, and in power,
 The Father speaks His dear Eternal Word.

Modernized and adapted
The Eternal Generation of the Son
 Fredrick William Faber, 1814-1863