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Words for children: glory, gospel, obedience

June 1, 2014
FBC Sermon #759
Text: Romans 16:21-27

Romans #95 **Paul's Concluding Words and Doxology**

Today we will conclude our study of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. In this final chapter of Romans, we have already considered (1) the recommendation of Phoebe to the church (vs. 1, 2), (2) a series of greetings from Paul to his friends in the ministry (vs. 3-16), and (3) a warning against false teachers (vs. 17-20). What is before us today is a series of greetings from Paul's companions (vs. 21-23) and then a closing doxology (vs. 25-27). Let us read these last verse of Paul's epistle, Romans 16:21-27.

²¹Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

²²I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

²³Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. ²⁴

²⁵Now 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 ²⁶but 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-- ²⁷to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom. 16:21-27, ESV)

We had read earlier in the chapter Paul's greetings to his friends and fellow servants who were in the church at Rome. But here in verses 21-23 we read of Paul sending greeting from his friends to the church in Rome. Paul probably wrote this epistle from the church at Corinth. The ones identified here were probably with Paul in Corinth when he composed the epistle.

Timothy is mentioned first. He was Paul's "fellow worker." He had become a companion of Paul on Paul's second missionary journey. We read of their meeting in Acts 16:1-3.

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (Acts 16:1-3)

Timothy became Paul's closest companion and fellow servant in the ministry. Paul would send Timothy on missions representing him.

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. ²⁰For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. ²¹For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. ²²But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. ²³Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. (Phi. 2:19-23)

Timothy was such a close companion of Paul in the ministry that when the apostle wrote his second epistle to the church at Corinth, Paul included Timothy as a kind of co-writer of the letter. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia." Later when Paul

wrote to Timothy directly, he addressed him while expressing great affection for him. We read in 1 Timothy 1:2, “To Timothy, *my true child in the faith*: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” Similarly we read in 2 Timothy 1:2, “To Timothy, *my beloved child*: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” It is understandable that when Paul gave the greetings of those with him to the church at Rome, that he would first mention Timothy.

Along with Timothy, Paul identified several others in verse 21. “Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; *so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen*.” In describing them as “kinsmen”, he was not saying that they were family relatives. These men were Jewish “kinsmen” of Paul.

Who was Lucius? Some argue he was Luke, but this is not the case. There was a “Lucius of Cyrene in the church at Antioch. We read in Acts 13:1, “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul (Paul).” But the Lucius mentioned here in Romans 16 was most certainly not Lucius of Cyrene.¹ We know nothing of certainty of this Lucius of Romans 16:21.

Paul mentions Jason, who probably was probably the same person mentioned in Acts 17 who was of Thessalonica. Acts 17:5-9 read,

But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” ⁸And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

It is commonly believed that Sosipater is Sospater that is mentioned in Acts 20:2-4.

²When he (Paul) had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. ³There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴*Sopater the Berean*, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.

In verse 22 the one to whom Paul had dictated this letter identified himself. “I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.” Perhaps Tertius was known by some at Rome so he chose to send his greeting to them.

The technical term for a scribe of this nature is an *amanuensis*. They were common in the Greco-Roman world. It can be determined that Paul had used the service of an amanuensis when composing a number of his letters. When Paul drafted 1 Corinthians he used amanuenses, but toward the end of the letter he wrote with his own hand these words, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand” (1 Cor. 16:21). There were letters circulating among the churches purporting to be written by Paul, but were spurious. In order for Paul to authenticate his letters, he would conclude the letter with his own hand. Paul alluded to these falsely attributed letters in 2 Thessalonians 2:1f,

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ²not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, *or a letter seeming to be from us*, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

We read in **2 Thessalonians 3:17**, of his need to close his authentic epistles with his own hand writing. “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is

¹ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 807.

the way I write.” And so we read **Colossians 4:18**, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.”

The apostle Paul more than likely had a long term problem with his eyesight. Perhaps this is why he seemed to dictate most of his letters to a scribe. When he wrote with his own hand at the end of one of his letters to authenticate it as his own, he wrote these words: “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand” (Gal. 6:11). These words seem to be that of one who had poor eyesight and so wrote with large letters.

Returning to Romans 16:23 we read of a man named **Gaius**. He was probably the Gaius of 1 Corinthians 1:14, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius.” Paul described Gaius as hosting Paul and the church. This is probably a reference to the church at Corinth. Gaius was probably a man of wealth.

Also in verse 23 we read of two others. “Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.” There is one named Erastus mentioned in Acts 19:22, “And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” We also read in 2 Timothy 4:20, “Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus.” It is possible this is the same Erastus that Paul mentioned in Romans 16:23. The greetings of these people from Corinth to the church at Rome include a reference to Quartus. “Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you” (16:23). There is no certainty that he is referred to elsewhere in the New Testament. Perhaps the church at Rome knew all of these ones mentioned in verses 21-23.

Now if you have an English Standard Version (ESV) before you, you will notice that there is no verse 24. The King James Version contains verse 24, which reads, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” If you take note of the ESV at 16:20, we read there of a shorter doxology. Although some argue that Paul concluded his letter intentionally with two statements nearly identical with one another, probably a later scribe mistakenly duplicated verse 20 which placed it in verse 24, since the additional verse 24 is found only in later manuscripts. Certainly nothing is lost from its exclusion. And nothing would be added by its inclusion. It is highly unlikely that Paul dictated the content of verse 24 to Tertius when drafting this epistle.

We then read the final doxology of Romans 16:25-27. Again it reads,

²⁵Now 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 ²⁶but 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-- ²⁷to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom. 16:21-27, ESV)

This doxology is a cleverly drafted statement that reasserts the major themes of the epistle. In a number of ways it parallels the opening 7 verses of the epistle in which Paul set forth his purpose for writing. In this doxology Paul expressed the fact that God had achieved His purposes in history. Paul desired that God would receive the glory for what has been revealed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has fulfilled His promises that were both hidden and revealed at the same time in the Old Testament Scriptures. As the Gentiles of all nations show forth their obedience born of faith, they manifest God’s glory of having fulfilled His promises to Abraham, that through him all the nations would be blessed of God, that all believers of all nations are children of Abraham.

So that we might better analyze this single sentence, let us consider the various clauses and their relationship with one another. There is a main clause accompanied by a long relative clause which contains a series of three phrases that explain God’s purposes being realized in us through Jesus Christ. Here is how the paragraph may be considered structurally:

²⁵Now 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
²⁶but 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—
²⁷to the only wise God
 be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom. 16:21-27, ESV)

The main clause of the sentence is this: ²⁵Now to Him... ²⁷be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” That is the main idea of this concluding sentence. Paul desired that God would be glorified through Jesus Christ. The pronoun “Him” could be understood as either God the Father, or perhaps better, to the One Triune God. The one relative clause between the first part of this main clause and the second part of the clause gives explanation of why this glory should be rendered to God. It is technically a long relative clause that begins with the relative pronoun, “who.” The expression of verse 27a, “to the only wise God” is an infinitive clause designed to describe further the supreme majesty of the wisdom of God for having planned and performed such a purpose in history.

Again, the clause that begins with the pronoun “who” continues through the phrase, “the obedience of faith—”, is a long and complex relative clause. It describes God’s ability to strengthen His people to enable them to live in obedience to Him. And so, the substance of the clause is this regarding God: “who is able to strengthen you... to bring about the obedience of faith—”.

Within this relative clause there are three subordinate phrases (prepositional phrases) that begin with the word “according to.” These serve to show that God is able to strengthen His people from all nations to live in obedience to Him, an obedience born of faith, in accordance with His eternal purpose in Christ, declared in the Old Testament Scriptures, revealed through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even the mystery that God has disclosed through His apostle, a mystery revealed that had been decreed by God from eternity.

Let us begin to work through this doxology to understand better and to appreciate better this elegant and comprehensive conclusion to the epistle. Again, the primary thrust of Paul’s final statement is an expression of his desire that God would receive glory through eternity through Jesus Christ. This is the end to which God has created all things. This is why God created you and me. He has a purpose for each of us, a purpose that will be realized. God will be glorified through each of us, every one of us without exception. But He will glorify Himself in each of us in just one of two possible ways. God will glorify Himself through some of us in the revelation of His righteous judgment and wrath upon our sin. In spite of all the mercy and acts of kindness that He has shown to many people, in spite of the gracious gospel of Jesus Christ being proclaimed to them through their lives, they persist in stubborn unbelief and defiant rebellion. They do not believe the gospel, they do not demonstrate obedience to His will. God will be glorified in their overthrow and in His damnation of their souls. But thankfully God has purposed to glorify Himself through His people in a far different manner. God will be glorified for His love and kindness and wisdom and power in redeeming sinners from their sin, giving them new life in Christ, enabling them to live to do His will to glorify Him in their lives. Thanks be to God for His free and sovereign will, purposing to glorify Himself in bringing us who believe salvation through Jesus Christ.

We read of these two ways in which God glorifies Himself in His dealings with humanity back in Romans 9.

¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

¹⁹You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²²What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- ²⁴even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom. 9:17-24)

In Romans 16:25 in which Paul expressed his desire for God to be glorified through Jesus Christ, he described God’s ability and intention *to strengthen His people to live in obedience to Him*, an obedience born of their faith in Him. We read, “Now to Him who is able to strengthen you... to bring about the obedience of faith—”. For Paul, true faith in Jesus Christ is always shown in obedience to the will of God, that is, the law of God. This was declared back in Romans 1 this way:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship *to bring about the obedience of faith* for the sake of his name among all the nations...” (Rom. 1:1-5)

We are justified before God through faith alone apart from works, but that faith moves us to show forth works of obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures as we are directed and strengthened by Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we became Christians, having placed our faith in the crucified, risen, and enthroned Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we were showing forth the fruit of His grace operative in our lives. He had placed within us a desire to please God in our lives. The love of God had been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that He had given us (cf. Rom. 5:5). But although He had infused within us the desire to obey Him, to live according to righteousness, we are still without strength to live in righteousness. It is impossible to live the Christian life, even by those who have new life in Christ, unless God strengthens us to do so by His grace, by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus gives His people.

It is absolutely necessary that we live in obedience, to live in righteousness. Romans 8:13 declares, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” The necessity of obedience for salvation is expressed in Galatians 6 in this way:

⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸*For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.* ⁹And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal. 6:7-10)

But if we are to live in obedience, God will have to strengthen us to do so. This comes through faith. We look to King Jesus to enable us by His kingly power to enable us to endure temptation, to resist the devil, and to conform our thinking and behavior to His will, as He gives us the Holy Spirit who empowers us to so live.

Now, Paul declared that this God, who is able to strengthen you unto the obedience of faith, does so “according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...” This is the *first* of three (prepositional) phrases beginning with the words, “according to.” The words, “according to”, conveys the idea that God strengthens His people unto obedience of faith “in accordance with”, even “because of”, “my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.”

The phrase could be understood more clearly if it were translated this way: “according to my gospel, even the preaching about Jesus Christ.” It is the gospel itself proclaimed to the Lord’s people, which God uses to strengthen His people. God strengthens His people by stirring faith in them through the gospel. The gospel is news of salvation through Jesus Christ. When Christ is preached and faith is placed in Jesus Christ through that proclamation, then God performs the supernatural work of strengthening His people unto their obedience to God through Jesus Christ.

When Paul uses the personal pronoun in the expression, “according to *my* gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ”, he was pointing to the fact that he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. His gospel was the gospel to the Gentile world. The content of his gospel was Jesus Christ. He proclaimed Jesus Christ and all that is entailed in that proclamation, and that very preaching was the means that God used to strengthen His people unto a faith that showed itself in obedience to Jesus Christ.

The *second* phrase that begins with the words “according to” also states that God will strengthen His people unto the obedience of faith, that He will do so in accordance or because of two additional reasons. Paul wrote that God strengthens His people unto obedience (1) “according to the revelation of the mystery” that he had made known and (2) through the mystery being revealed through the prophetic writings made known to all nations. The revelation of “the mystery” has reference to God’s purpose to bring Gentile believers into equal and shared status with believing Jews. Paul had indicated to the church at Ephesus that God had ordained him to reveal this purpose of God that had not previously been disclosed clearly, although it had been testified to by the Old Testament prophets. We read in Ephesians 3:1ff these words:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles-- ²assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of His power. ⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him. (Eph. 3:1-12)

In addition to this mystery being revealed through Paul’s preaching, the mystery is also revealed through the Holy Scriptures that have been taught among the Gentiles. The mystery had been kept secret for long ages, but has now been revealed “through the prophetic writings” made known to all nations. Paul is declaring that what was transpiring in the world was the realization of God’s purpose in history. It was an eschatological (end time) event that God had brought to pass in bringing Gentiles to faith, a faith that was shown forth in obedience to the will of God. Paul in every way has argued that this New Testament age, the proclamation and reception of Jews and Gentiles into the church through Jesus Christ, is the realization of the Old Testament hope of the people of God. Contrary to the common understanding

that the church has no connection with the nation of Israel, Paul argues that the church is enjoying the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

The *third* phrase that Paul began with the words, "according to", speaks of God strengthening His people to enable their obedience born of faith "according to the command of the eternal God." This speaks of God's eternal decree. Before creation God decreed all things that come to pass in history. What Paul declared that the people being saved through faith in Jesus Christ would be strengthened unto the obedience of faith had been purposed by God from eternity. God had devised all that was being realized in the church. It is no surprise that Paul described God in this context as "to the only wise God" to whom be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.

As we conclude our study of this glorious epistle, let us affirm for ourselves the promises of God in Jesus Christ. We are enjoying the realization of God's promises in history. The Old Testament patriarchs looked for the day when they would enjoy the blessing of God promised to them. We live in that day and are the ones to whom the promises God that He gave the patriarchs have been realized. Abraham looked toward the day we enjoy in Christ. He saw it in Christ and was therefore glad, as we ought to be also. And the prophets as well foretold of the experience in Christ Jesus that we enjoy in this church age. Peter declared:

Though now you do not see Him (Jesus Christ), yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith-- the salvation of your souls. ¹⁰Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, ¹¹searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹²To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things which angels desire to look into. (1 Pet. 1:8-12)

God has declared our present justification before Himself, we who have put our faith in His Son Jesus Christ. We are justified, declared pardoned of sin and righteous before God, through faith alone. And as such, He has pledged that we will be fully delivered from His wrath that will be administered on all the world on the Last Day. We have been exonerated from our guilt that we inherited from our father Adam, for he had broken the covenant of works to which he represented us before God. But further, we have been justified of all of our actual sins, our transgressions of God's law that we have committed in thought, attitude, action, and word. But we have also been pardoned for the sin principle that still lies within us. We are joined to Christ, having died to the former life in which we had lived. We now identify ourselves with the new life we have in Jesus Christ. And having been justified by God's grace, we now are experiencing the grace of sanctification, as God works in and through us by Jesus Christ. He breaks the power of sin in our lives, having delivered us from the power of the devil. He has promised to deliver us from the power of sin even as we trust Him and live for Him. We look to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and He sends to us the Holy Spirit to enable us to do that which we desire to do but have no power to do apart from fresh manifestations of His gracious Spirit to us. And we live in certain anticipation of our own glorification. For our God has promised us that we will rise one day from the grave and that He will glorify us in Jesus Christ. And that we will be finally fully delivered from sin that plagues us. May our Lord enable us to take to heart and mind these glorious truths.

"Now to Him... to the only wise God be glory forever more through Jesus Christ! Amen."