

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation
TITLE: To God Be the Glory
SCRIPTURE: Romans 16:25-27
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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

What is it that makes you feel strong, stable, secure, and confident? No one likes to feel weak and unstable, right? Of course not. So we gravitate toward things that give us a sense of stability—security. *So, what are those things for you? Is it financial security? Is it being liked by people you admire? Is it feeling like you are in control of your life? Maybe it's good looks or being physical strong/physically fit. It could be the kind of car you drive or where you live or maybe it's standing up to people who try to take advantage of you or maybe it's your politics or being "right" theologically? Maybe it's a combination of several of these things.* There are all kinds of things we gravitate toward that give us a sense of stability and strength and security and confidence because God knows—this world is an unstable place—violence, injustice, political unrest—threats of terrorism—the ongoing problem of racism—we all know we live in a broken, unstable world.

It was no different in Paul's day. To live in first century Rome was to live in a very unstable place. Rome was an overpopulated, disease-infested, violent city. Crime was rampant. Riots between different ethnic groups was commonplace. There was constant political unrest. *So try to hear the final verses of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome as they would have heard it.*

Now to the one who is able to strengthen you—to the one who is able to make you stable. He's saying that God is able to empower you to stop living as if you are a victim with no power and no control—to stop living like a ball in a pinball machine bouncing off the circumstances of your life—living in fear of your future or weighed down by the guilt or bitterness of your past. Paul is saying that God has something better for you. He is able to stabilize you, strengthen you, establish you. *So how does he do this?*

God brings his stability into our unstable world through the Gospel of Jesus. He brings his stability into our unstable lives, *not by* commanding us to try harder, *not by* promising that if we just have more faith then we can make all the things we don't like go away. No, God is able to make you stable as you believe in, rely on, cling to, rest in the Good News of Jesus. God has not promised that the world will get better and better, in fact, if I read my New Testament correctly, our world will keep getting *more and more unstable* until Jesus comes back to set things right. *So if we are going to continue living in an unstable world then do you see why what Paul says here is so important?* The promise is—no matter how unstable *your* world or *this* world becomes God is able to make you stable through your unwavering faith in the Gospel of Jesus. The heart of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead—*So that now—We are justified—put right with God—by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—So that now—We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—So that now—we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit—So that now—There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus—So that now—The righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit—So that now—If God is for us who can be against us?— So that now—Nothing*

can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus—So that now—We are more than conquerors through him who loves us—So that now—Whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved—So that now—The God of hope fills us with all joy and peace in believing by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the GOOD NEWS of Romans! And you never, never, never outgrow your need for that Good News. You don't begin the Christian life with the Gospel and then leave it behind to go on to something more important, more relevant—You don't get the Gospel and then move beyond it—NO—you *get the Gospel and move into it*—God strengthens us with this Gospel till the day we die. *Paul goes on to show us how the Gospel is the very thing God uses to strengthen our faith.*

Notice that there are three “according to’s” here. God is able to make you stable (1) *according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ (25a)*; (2) *according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations (25b-26a)*; and (3) *according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith (26b)*. Three “according to’s”—not that there are three different ideas here—but as I understand it—the first “according to” is described by the second—and the second “according to”—is explained by the third. *Maybe best read like this*—God is able to make you stable through the Gospel of Jesus *which* is the mystery of revelation kept secret for long ages past *which has been revealed at this time* by the command of the eternal God.

When you read the Old Testament, you find men and women puzzled as to how God was going to pull together all its great promises and prophecies. For example, there's the promise of the restoration of Israel. There's the promise of the forgiveness of an individual's sins and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. There's the promise of the healing of the nations and the cessation of war, but no one understood how all this would fit together. Peter says the prophets of old searched diligently to see what kind of person and time the things they spoke about would come to pass, but it was a mystery to them. That's why it is called a *mystery*. In Bible language, a mystery is something that was hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New. Here's the point: The gospel is the unfolding of a mystery— a mystery kept secret since the world began but has now been revealed by the coming of Jesus. And the mystery was that Jews and Gentiles would be united into one new people through faith in Jesus Christ (cf Eph 3:1-6 and Col 1:26-27) *Why is that so important?* Because Paul is describing the Gospel here in one sentence as both an eternal story stretching from eternity past to eternity future—but he also focuses our attention on Jesus. It's a big story, but it all focuses on a single person, our Savior Jesus. And the very first Christmas was the revelation, the unveiling of that mystery. You could say that the mystery was revealed in a manger.

As Paul reminds himself and his readers of the magnitude of the eternal glory of the Gospel, it leads him to bow his head and lift his hands—he's no longer teaching or explaining or defending—he's simply worshipping—and he explodes with praise. *Now to him—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.* He *extols* the glory of God. And think about this—out of all the things he could have said about the glory of the God what he chooses to ascribe to God is the fact that God is able to make us stable through the Gospel of Jesus. *Now to him who is able to make you stable—to the only wise God—be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

It took John Piper seven years to teach through Romans. He preached five messages on 16:25-27. Here's how he concluded one of those messages—“Our God has worked in history to defeat sin and Satan and hell and death. He did this through the Gospel of Jesus. Embrace this Gospel as the greatest treasure of your life. God will magnify his glory in making you strong.”

Discussion Starters —

1. Read 16:25-27 together. Share some times in your life when God strengthened you.
2. What things other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ have you been tempted to cling to for stability?
3. How does God use the Gospel to strengthen/establish individual Christians?
4. How does God use the Gospel to strengthen/establish the church? What things other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ do churches often try to cling to for stability?
5. What have been some of the most helpful insights you've gained during our 46 weeks study of Romans? Look back at the list of “*so that nows*” above. Which of those speaks to a circumstance you need Gospel strength in right now.