

Stability—Romans 16:25—6/30/2013

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Open to the very end of Paul’s letter to the Romans today as we start into the final few verses that make up an expanded doxology.

Romans 16:25-27 contain an extended praise of God, most basically for His power and His wisdom, but more broadly for all He is and has done that this letter has described.

It’s almost like these last 3 verses give a truth-packed review of the whole of this epistle with its multifaceted glory of God on display.

So covering these verses will allow us to sum up what we’ve studied and response in praise to God.

With that in mind, let’s read Romans 16:25-27. [READ]

Notice that this is a doxology—which means it’s a word of praise, a statement of glory belonging to God, directed to God.

Paul starts with “now to Him” and defines Him by what He is able to do and how He does it in verse 25 and how that’s connected with His eternity and historic plan in verse 26.

Then in verse 27, Paul comes back to the object of the doxology—the powerful, all-sufficient God he has spoken of—and cannot resist adding a reference to God’s wisdom too.

After all Paul has written in verses 25-26, praise is uncontainable to honor God’s wise plan and how He accomplished His plan.

So the doxology climaxes in verse 27 through Jesus Christ.

And the main thrust is glory to God—that God is glorious and that we should ascribe glory to God as we see His worth.

But to ascribe glory, we must see that glory & value it.

To feel the impulse to point and say “Wow—that is truly awesome!”, we must feel the weight of awesomeness.

So Paul does more here than end with a call to praise God for His power and wisdom.

He unfolds a small display of God’s power and wisdom to stun us to recall who we’re worshipping and why.

You see—doxology rightly flows from theology.

Solid praise is the result of solid doctrine.

The richest emotional and personal response to God comes from the fullest embrace of truth from God.

And that’s why we want to take the time to unpack the treasures collected in the words of these verses.

God’s power and wisdom are the two attributes of God that are primarily highlighted here as reasons for praise.

Verse 25 opens with thoughts of God’s power and verse 27 culminates with praise of the only wise God.

Verse 25 starts with power—to Him who is able, which means to God who has the power, who can do it, who is fully capable and equipped.

So today we will focus on praising God for what He is able to do, for His power, and then we’ll get to His wisdom later.

Thinking of God’s power, it’s good to recall that of all God is able to do, He is not able to sin.

And that’s less an issue of His power as it is an issue of His desire and His holiness and His perfection.

God's power is so great that He is able to do whatever He wants.

But He only wants to do what is good and right and loving and wise and holy and beautiful in all ways.

So God's infinite power is only perfect and praiseworthy because His power is also governed by infinite goodness.

Think of it—only when power is motivated and used in such good, perfect, wise ways is it worthy of praise.

When a tyrannical, abusive, self-absorbed king crushes His people with destructive power, he is not praiseworthy.

Or when a muscle-bound bully pushes others around, he is not viewed and valued as glorious and honorable, is he?

So power in itself is not necessarily praiseworthy.

We must see God's power in the ultimate praiseworthy light of how He exercises His power to save sinners and lift them up and that's what Paul focused up in Roman 16:25.

Read verse 25 for what God is able to do that is praiseworthy. [READ]

God is able to establish or strengthen you.

And this was speaking to followers of Jesus, to Christians in Rome and by application that speaks to us today if we trust & know Jesus Christ.

So that's why we're talking today about stability—because the praise of God's power here focuses on His power to stabilize His people, His power to establish and strengthen Christians.

That word for establish is used in Luke 16:26 of the great gulf fixed between the rich man in hell & Lazarus at Abraham's side in heaven.

That chasm was fixed, unmovable, & anchored like Jesus set His face steadfastly or resolutely to go to Jerusalem when His time came for His crucifixion.

No one could budge Him away from God's plan and nothing could successfully get in the way or stop Him.

He was established, strengthened, strong, firm & set.

And that's the faithfulness we want to have as followers of Jesus.

I don't want to waver in faith—I don't want to fail and fall and shame the name of Jesus and bring grief and sorrow and disappointment to my Lord and my family and my church.

I want to stay on track, keep growing, and be strong.

And I want that for you too.

None of us are perfect and so we will fail in big or small ways but I don't want to see the big ways and I want to smooth out the small ways as much as possible.

I've seen enough pain & heartache & hardship from lack of stability & strength & I want to guard us from that.

I share Paul's longing in writing this letter to the Romans that his spiritual gifts may be used by God to establish others.

As he began this letter, he wrote of longing for their stability in Romans 1:11 with the same word he used here in verse 25.

In Romans 1:11-12 he wrote this: *"I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."*

Similarly today, I want you to be established by God.

With that goal mind, I'm going to outline for you 5 ways to be strengthened and established and stable as a Christian in this life.

5 ways to walk toward solid security and resolute steadfastness.

The 1st of those 5 ways to be increasing in spiritual strength is to look to God for the power of stability.

Point #1 today—look to God for the power of stability.

If you want to overcome the days you are a basket-case and feel tossed here & there by emotions and impulses and drawn by temptations and oppressed by situations, then 1st look to God for the power of stability.

Think how the first few words of this doxology in Romans 16:25 remind us of this basic truth.

God is the One who is able to establish you, to strengthen you, to make you steadfast and stable and resolved and unwavering.

You may think that spiritual giants like Jonathan Edwards were merely what we'd call type-A personalities who were driven to be successful or naturally resilient or whatever.

But that's not entirely the case—Edwards' 70 resolutions, for example, emphasize how serious he was about depending on God & not himself.

He was very serious about trusting God for daily grace and power to stand firm and he was zealous for giving God glory and thanks for every ounce of perseverance & good fruit.

If you want to be strong spiritually & grow & hold fast when your love is rejected as hate-speech, for example, you cannot look to yourself.

The Christian life is not lived by pulling yourself up by your bootstraps or stuffing all your emotions and burdens to cover it all up and resolve to fight in your own strength.

That's not living by faith in the unseen, all-powerful God who is able to make you stand strong.

That's a self-trusting lie that either puts you at war with everyone around you or puts your insecurity into a kettle to stew until it blows up.

You may fool yourself into believing you are strong and stable, but you will be isolated and merely use other people rather than loving them and that will come crashing down when others use you.

We cannot and will not find true, lasting security and stability in ourselves and we will also not find it in the stuff of this life.

Success in this life and money and possessions will not satisfy.

Stock markets & real estate & the economy & government & every other part of life are proving that they are all unstable.

The world and its systems and insurance policies and retirement plans are not intended or designed by God to be our source of stability.

We don't gain strength and certainty and steadfastness from looking at our investment portfolio or educational pedigree.

As we celebrate another Independence Day in our nation this week on July 4th, we need to sift through what is biblically right and why.

If the greatest thing about America is the ability to accumulate lots of stuff and experience plenty of entertainment and have enough money that we don't need to trust God, that's not great.

It's apparent that that version of the American Dream is falling apart.

But beyond the instability of our national defense & economy & freedom & government, we need to ask ourselves as Christians how we are different in where we place our hope?

As Christians, when will we stop believing & propagating the supposed American Dream & look to God as our source of security?

If we want to prepare our kids for the future, the only certainty is that God will be on His throne exercising His infinite power for the good, growing steadfastness of His people.

So that's where we need to anchor our hopes.

We can't spend all our time and money on worldly achievements & passing pleasures & assume that God will come along to bless us as we ignore Him.

A life of faith looks to Him who is able to establish us, to the invisible but all-powerful God who is able to strengthen and sustain us.

So if you look at yourself and all around and you often feel weak and desperate, then praise God!

We should feel weak and desperate because we are weak & desperate.

And that should make us pray and meditate on the God who is able to strengthen us and meet our true needs for His glory.

For those of you who know me, you know I'm not just saying that because you hear my anxious worrying and see my overwhelmed moodiness and I'm thankful that you love me and pray for me.

But just in case anyone thought the guy you hear preach is just naturally robust in personality or easily effervescent in relationships, that's not the case.

I need today's sermon preached to me more than any of you.

Yes, I can praise God for 19 wonderful years of marriage and 12.5 precious years as pastor here and long-time cherished friends and other blessings, but it is all truly grace from God.

He is the power behind it because I feel and have seen how fragile it can be and how easily everything can crumble if God does not hold it together and establish His people deeper each day for His glory.

So if you look at others and want something of their stability, don't look at the external appearances you envision could apply to you—instead look to God.

Look to God for the power of stability because it's only Him.

Look to God to supply your financial needs when your integrity is on the line or your roles at home are in the balance and it's easier to see dollar signs than divine promises.

And look to God more deeply than the surface provisions of life—look to Him for your soul's comfort and hope and joy to press on and stand firm for truth and speak up in love and serve through suffering.

Look to Him when you face false teachers like those warned of in Romans 16:17-20 that influenced Paul's thinking to bring up this assurance of God's power for His people here.

If you need encouragement that the devil and his false teachers won't finally deceive you, then look to God's power.

In God alone our security rests and that's a timely reminder after the warnings about trouble makers in verses 17-20.

Resting in God alone is how we feel assured and protected and kept.

So look to God for the power of stability—that's point #1.

Then 2ndly, look to the Gospel for the grace of stability.

When you look to God as the power of stability, be sure you are looking to Him through the promises of the Gospel.

Be sure you are not looking to God as a cosmic genie or a distant despot who either exists to serve you or does not care for you at all.

Look to God in accord with the Gospel to define your relationship with Him.

Let the Gospel frame His promised goodness toward you based on His grace and not on your performance.

It's not the law or our obedience that gives us ultimate hope when we seek to anchor our souls in God.

It's the Good News of full and free forgiveness that we receive by faith in God's supply for us in Christ.

As Romans 1:16 states, the Gospel is the power of God for salvation but that salvation has continual application with each new day as we walk in grace.

And that's what Paul referred to in Romans 16:25 in stating that God is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel.

The Gospel is the paradigm for growth in sanctification and security and assurance just as it is the path of initial salvation.

And by the way, Paul was not distinguishing his gospel from any other gospel preached by Jesus or the other Apostles.

This was his Gospel only in the sense that the Lord Jesus had appeared to him and taught him and given him revelation that he passed on in letters like this one.

But his was the same gospel that Peter & other NT Apostles preached.

And Acts records their affirmation & agreement in the Gospel.

So when Paul called this 'my gospel', he was merely personalizing his own acceptance of it and his calling to preach it.

It's an implied reference to his apostleship as he again mirrors some of the thoughts he began with in chapter 1.

And it's also a fitting reminder of his thorough exposition of the Gospel in this treasure-laden letter about salvation by grace alone.

As they meditated upon & more fully understood & deeply rested in the Gospel, they would be further strengthened.

That's because this Good News of the free gift of righteousness from God that fulfills His standard of righteousness is the strongest stability.

When God Himself provides what He has required and He gives it freely not based on any works or efforts or anything we could do or have done or will do, it IS secure.

When God Himself pays the penalty to free us from punishment for our crimes, we can stand firm in His kind Gospel provision.

When God's gavel slams down as the Judge and He declares us righteous in His sight, no more accusers or witnesses will be heard because the supreme Ruler has spoken.

When God Himself adopts us into His family by giving us His own Spirit, we can feel established and anchored as children of God.

Those are just a few ways the Gospel aligns us with this God who is able to establish us increasingly each day.

So as you've heard me say before, preach this Gospel to yourself every day, to refresh your mind in God's grace.

Since God uses the Gospel to strengthen & sustain us & to make us steadfast, we never outgrow our need for the Gospel.

And our stability deepens when we recall that this Gospel is not bare facts listed in some heavenly file drawer.

This Gospel is about a Person, the very 2nd Person of the Godhead who became a Man to accomplish all that was needed to give all that is promised as Good News.

That's where the next phrase of verse 25 gives us further encouragement in our pursuit of stability.

The next phrase is parallel to the Gospel and reminds us that it is Good News because it is the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus the Messiah is the object of the preaching, because He is the One preached about, we gain greater assurance.

So as a related, but 3rd way of being established & strengthened in the Christian life, look to Jesus for the assurance of stability.

Point #3—look to Jesus for the assurance of stability.

When verse 25 mentions the preaching, it is referring to the message preached, the content of that preaching rather than merely the act of preaching.

And what makes the preaching of the Gospel so compelling and so securing and sustaining is the focus on Jesus Christ.

We have a hero who has won the historic battle & has called us His brothers and chosen to share His lavish inheritance with us.

As Romans 6 taught us, Jesus rose from the dead never to die again.

He was raised, as Romans 4:25 says, because of our justification—because our declared legal standing with God as righteous was purchased and secured.

Romans 3:25-26 say Jesus was displayed publicly as a propitiation, meaning He was shown as the sacrifice to satisfy God's wrath on sin.

Therefore God was proven to be just and right as Judge and also the gracious justifier of those who have faith in Christ.

The forgiveness and righteousness given to those who trust Christ is not based on trickery or deceit or questionable ethics or methods.

It is fully accomplished by Christ with the provision of His perfect life and atoning death and victorious resurrection.

It's all truly done and the infinite value of Jesus' Person & work make it all truly secure for those who trust Him.

As we studied in Romans 10:17, faith comes by hearing and hearing by what?—by the word of Christ—by the message about Christ because the Gospel is truly all about Him.

2nd Corinthians 4:5 says, "*we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, & ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*"

So looking to Jesus gives the fullest measure of assurance.

Remembering that the Gospel is about this glorious, gracious, perfect Person Jesus Christ solidifies us in steadfastness.

God is able to establish & strengthen His people according to the gracious, free Gospel and the proclaimed truths about the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

So the path of true stability is the path of faith—to look away from yourself and give up on your way of living and your list of accomplishments and your sources of pride.

Look away from all that and from anyone or anything else and look to God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ by the Gospel.

That is the place to start a right relationship with God today if you've never truly turned from your sin to follow Jesus.

And that's the life that continues growing in repentance and faith with God and His grace in Christ as your goal.

So #1, Look to God for the power of stability.

#2, look to the Gospel for the grace of stability.

#3, look to Jesus for the assurance of stability.

And 4thly, look to the Scriptures for the deepening of stability.

Point #4—look to the Scriptures for the deepening of stability.

Read Romans 16:25-26 again. [READ]

Today I'm not going to talk about the mystery mentioned here or what's hidden and how or when & how it's revealed & made known.

We'll save that for next time and today just note that God has revealed Himself and His plan through His written Word.

Whether that is in the OT or in the NT, it is all a revelation of God & His plan for the ages and how we relate to Him.

Whether those OT or NT Scriptures are prophetic or narrative or historical or epistles, they are God's Word to man.

So the way we get to know God and His ways is to study His Word.

The way we seek God to gain strength & stability in Him is by seeking Him in the Scriptures & growing in our grasp of truth.

The Scripture is where we find promises of stability like Philippians 1:6 that says, "I am *confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

It's where we find wondrous other doxologies like Jude 24-25, which says, "*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless 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.*"

It is so strengthening to know what God is able to do in His power extolled in passages like these and others.

Another one is 2nd Corinthians 9:8: "*God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.*"

The Christian life is looking away from ourselves with faith in the invisible God and that can be difficult at times when all we see seems so dark or discouraging or fearful or uncertain.

But faith is made so much more real and motivating as we lay hold of more and more promises like these.

Sometimes we lack faith because we don't know who God is or what He has said about what we face.

So to grow in faith we must grow in the knowledge of God & His Word as the object of our trust.

Since faith by nature looks away from self, it is built by looking at how high and strong and wide and deep and sure the structure of God's promises are built up in His Word for us to bank on.

If you picture faith as leaning on God and His promises, we'll only lean with as much weight as we think can be held.

So if we only think of God as the size of a piece of gravel, we'll only lean out big toe into Him for security.

But if we grow to understand God and His promises as the size of your car, you will lean more on Him than you would on a piece of gravel but you may not trust Him in really big things.

But if we grow to view God's faithful character and revelation as bigger and stronger than any building or mountain, we will gladly lean on Him with all our weight and feel the rest of freedom from worry.

I know that analogy may or may not make sense, but the idea is simply that our exercise of faith is linked to our view of God.

And our exercise of faith is what gives us our experience of stability and security in God through Christ and the Gospel.

So the more we know of God and Christ and the Gospel, the bigger our object of faith will be to us and the more we will lean on God in faith.

Through that increasing faith will come increasing strength.

And the main way to learn more of God and His ways and of Jesus Christ and His Gospel is through reading and studying and meditating on the Scriptures.

So get into God's Word and trust Him to grow you there.

That's our 4th way to seek stability—to look to the Scriptures for the deepening of stability.

Then 5thly and lastly, I want to step back to the beginning of verse 25 and the flow through verse 27 to remind us that this is a doxology.

This is a description of praise to God, of giving glory to God.

So I want to point us lastly today to the value of praise, to the vital importance of worshiping God in our thoughts and words and songs throughout each day and in our gatherings together.

When Paul had unfolded rich truths in this letter and other letters, it often moved him to praise.

And that praise also often moved him to respond with prayer or application or explanation of further related truths.

In each case, praise helped cultivate those truths and produced experience of those truths in life.

I want us to remember that.

Sometimes we can think of words of praise as something to share only if there is time or only if we are sure no one will take it the wrong way or whatever.

But we shouldn't be bashful about praising God because it strengthens our own faith and it stimulates the faith of others.

And the same is true of singing God's praise.

Expressing our affection and appreciation to God in song anchors and motivates us with what we believe as we express it.

Singing is not like an optional part of the Christian life and we need to be careful we don't view it like that.

I appreciate people wanting to be here for the sermon, for example, but we dare not look at the singing before the sermon as unimportant.

What we sing and what we give toward our singing are powerful aids to strengthening and sustaining us.

When I visit Christians in the hospital or pray with people in trials, I often ask God to bring to mind songs to nourish & encourage them.

I pray that because songs and praise of God are often what carries a believer through the pain or the uncertainties as truth soaks into through memorized verses or songs.

For example, some of you may not think you know 2nd Timothy 1:12.

But when you hear it, you recall a song celebrates its truth.

2nd Timothy 1:12 says, “*For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*”

Do that ring a bell? Listen to the words of a related song.

*I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he hath made known,
nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for his own.
But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able
to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.*

*I know not how this saving faith to me he did impart,
nor how believing in his word wrought peace within my heart.
I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing us of sin,
revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in him.*

*I know not when my Lord may come, at night or noontide fair,
nor if I walk the vale with him, or meet him in the air.
But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able
to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.*

That's just one example and I could list many other old hymns or contemporary songs that anchor me with truth celebrated.

So as a 5th point of application here today—look to praise for the cultivation of stability.

#5—look to praise for the cultivation (and you might even add the celebration) of stability.

Look to praising God for the cultivation and celebration of spiritual stability in the Christian life.

Praise is a prized practice that we must prioritize.

I want to be stable and firm to the end in my walk with Christ.

And I want that for all of you too.

I want that for God's glory and I want it for our own good.

So #1, look to God for the power of stability.

2, look to the Gospel for the grace of stability.

#3, look to Jesus for the assurance of stability.

#4, look to the Scriptures for the deepening of stability.

And #5, look to praise for the cultivation & celebration of stability.

Now let me close by reading Ephesians 3:14-21.

Ephesians 3:14-21, “*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”*

Pray with me.