

How God is Wise, Part 1—Romans 16:25-27—7/14/2013

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Turn to the end of Paul’s letter to the Romans where we will finish our verse-by-verse study through it next Sunday, Lord willing.

We’re in the final paragraph, which is only one sentence and is more a final exclamation than a conventional sentence.

Yet in keeping with Paul’s style, it is full of modifying parts that expand on the basic thought to deepen and enrich it.

It’s almost like Paul finished, he stopped & said, “Did you catch that? Praise GOD for how powerful He is to do all that and praise GOD for how wise He is to plan all that—wow!”

Kids—these verses are like when you run to your mom or dad or others and say, “Hey, did you see that? Look at this, let me tell you.”

In a much grander way, that’s what Paul did as he reflected on what he had written in Romans and closed with the doxology.

So let’s read that doxology—which means word of praise—in Romans 16:25-27 as we get started. [READ]

If you’ve been with us, you recall that we studied greetings to people in Rome & warnings about protecting relationships.

And we also learned from greetings from those with Paul in Corinth as he wrote the letter.

Then we began learning from the final doxology in verses 25-27 that caps off the book with glory to God.

Last time we focused on verse 25 and Paul’s praise of God’s power as the One who is able to establish or strengthen His people.

God alone is able to save a soul and to stabilize and sustain us in saving faith and to keep us faithful to the end.

As Paul highlighted that and recalled the means that God uses to do so, we outlined 5 ways to be established and strengthened and secure in your daily life in relationship with God.

God Himself is the power of our stability.

The Gospel is the grace of our stability.

The Lord Jesus is the assurance of our stability.

The Scriptures provide for the deepening of our stability.

And praise helps us cultivate and celebrate our stability.

Those applications flowed from the exaltation of God as able to establish you according to the Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to revelation in the Scriptures.

That focus was the first part of this doxology.

We said that this doxology focuses on God’s power & God’s wisdom.

So now today we come to the focus on God’s wisdom.

Today & next Sunday as we think through the details of verses 25-27, we want to be drawn to praise God for His wisdom.

That’s the point here—that’s the end goal in verse 27, to give glory forever to the only wise God through Jesus Christ.

But if I just stood up & said—‘Hey, let’s praise God for His wisdom!’, how passionately would you respond & how deeply would you feel it?

Some of you might gladly agree that God is wise or others might reflect back worship to Him somehow.

But with any attribute of God—and especially with His wisdom—we need to think about it to respond rightly.

Kids, you know how sad it is to want to share about something and to have your parent or sibling or friend or neighbor say, “Yeah, yeah, that’s great”, but not listen.

You want to tell more or to have them come see more because they won’t feel your excitement unless they hear or see more.

Well, in the same way, if you want to feel the excitement Paul had that lit him up for the most amazing adventures, then you need to listen carefully to him here.

He’s going to tell us some things that should make our heads spin with awe and delight about the wisdom of our God.

My goal is to lead us in worship of God by considering how wise He is in 6 ways this week and next week.

We’ll cover 3 ways God is wise today & finish the other 3 next week.

But first, we need to start by defining wisdom.

What do we mean when we say that God is wise?

God knows everything—He is omniscient—but that is a different, distinct attribute worthy of our worship.

Of course, being all-knowing is helpful in being all-wise, but we need to discern the difference between knowledge and wisdom.

You can know lots of stuff but not be wise.

As a worldly example, I’m amazed at people who work in the medical field that have some of the most horrible health habits.

They may know how the body works and what destroys the lungs or the liver, but they still smoke and drink excessively and are sexually immoral and more.

Knowing the risks and dangers and consequences of such behaviors while living in those same destructive patterns is not wise.

Such people have knowledge, but do not exercise wisdom.

The OT book of Proverbs describes wisdom as skill in practice, whether that’s wise or skillful handiwork or it’s wise or skillful management of finances or relationships.

Wisdom puts knowledge to work in the best possible ways.

John Piper defined wisdom like this—“Wisdom is knowing what the greatest goal is in any situation, & what the best way is to achieve it.”

In other words, wisdom is knowing what to do & how to do it.

And what today’s text is showing is that God is all-wise, that He alone is the supreme fount of wisdom, the superlative standard of wisdom.

Paul is leading us to admire God’s wisdom.

And the first way we honor God’s wisdom is in how He reveals it.

God chose to reveal His plan for history progressively, little by little, through prophets and pictures and promises over time.

God always keeps His people looking to Him, knowing enough to look to Him, but not knowing so much that they think they don’t need Him.

And that is just a part of the wisdom of how He has worked.

Think of it this way—when you watch a good movie or show or a game or sporting event or series, what keeps you watching?

As my sons and I rooted for the San Antonio Spurs to defeat the Miami Heat in the National Basketball Association Finals in June, I kept wanting to quit watching.

I just felt like the Heat were going to somehow win and I didn't want to waste my time or watch and be disappointed.

But my sons kept insisting because the Spurs won Game 1 and kept winning the next game each time after the Heat tied it.

So we kept watching all the way through the final Game 7.

Similarly, with a great drama or action of a movie or book, the way to keep you riveted is by progressively unfolding the story with a nugget here and a connection there along the way.

That builds a sense of expectation and it carries the enjoyment of the experience along as the story develops and climaxes.

God is a wise story-teller and He even created us to enjoy the ups and downs and details and nuances of a good story.

So it's no surprise that God is telling a great story in history.

God has planned an amazing drama of rescuing sinners out of slavery and bringing us into a glorious home by His grace.

Yet even how God has revealed His story bit by bit shows His wisdom because He has preserved our responsible choices through it all.

Creatures like us cannot cop out as if we know the end because He only reveals enough for us to fully engage in our part.

And we see the interplay of God hiding and yet revealing His plan through the words of Paul in verses 25-26 of Romans 16.

So read Romans 16:25-26 and we'll note a first point. [READ]

Point #1 about how God is wise—God is wise in how He progressively revealed His plan.

#1, God is wise in how He progressively revealed His plan.

By progressively I mean a little at a time, piece by piece over time.

That's how He taught His plan to send Jesus to save sinners from all kinds of people and bring them together in the church.

If you all think about this, it can help you not only praise and trust God's wisdom, but also better understand His Word.

First note that word revelation in verse 25—God establishes or strengthens His people according to revelation.

Revelation is God making something known, revealing it, showing it.

God's general revelation is seen in His creation and in the human conscience as we've noted before in Romans 1-2.

God has put within and around every person the reality that He exists as eternal and powerful with a moral law.

But that general revelation is not enough to tell us how to be rescued from the penalty of breaking God's law.

General revelation can only show us God & our need to seek Him.

So that's why we have the Bible.

Oh, friends, can I encourage you again to treasure having a Bible and commit afresh to knowing it and memorizing it?

The Bible is God's special revelation, the specific communication from God of who He is and how to know Him and how to be right with Him and how He deals with people.

Paul says in Romans 16:25 that the way God establishes, strengthens, stabilizes and sustains His people is according to revelation.

We must have a word from God in order to be secure.

And specifically here, verse 25 celebrates revelation of the mystery.

That's not a mystery like Sherlock Holmes or your favorite detective or adventure story, though it is something similar.

A mystery in the NT is something that was hidden that God has now revealed, something that was not clear before that God has made clear.

It something that was hidden in the shadows and God pulled it out of the shadows so it could be fully seen.

Verse 25 says this mystery was kept secret for long ages past.

Going back to the eternal counsels of the Three-in-One God, this plan existed & was kept a mystery not revealed right away.

And this is one of several mysteries mentioned in the NT, a few of which are unrelated to this one.

For example, 2nd Thessalonians 2:7-8 mentions the mystery of lawlessness at work now that will be unrestrained in the end.

And Revelation 17:5 & 7 mention mysteries of evil in the end.

But most mysteries in the NT connect somehow with the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Even the mystery of the Rapture in 1st Corinthians 15:51 is linked to Christ as the firstfruits of the resurrection & our going to be with Him.

Similarly, 1st Timothy 3:9 & 16 mention the mystery of the faith and the mystery of godliness, which are linked to Christ.

But most often and most specifically in the NT, the mystery revealed is that of Christ and the church as you may recall from Ephesians 5:32.

How Christ came to indwell His church as a newly unified believing body of Jews and Gentiles is a mystery revealed.

Let's see a passage that shows this because it's a central theme of God's wisdom that Paul is celebrating and I don't want you to miss it.

Turn to the end of Romans 11—what climaxes in Romans 11?

Some of you kids memorized Romans 11:36—from Him & through Him & to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever, amen.

Romans 11:33-36 is where Paul is jumping for joy, not because he won a soccer game or got a big paycheck or a good grade or found a great deal shopping, but because of God's wisdom.

Read Romans 11:33-36. [READ]

You may know those verses as an exultant doxology, but do you see that they are a celebration of God's wisdom?

They are an example of how to respond with praise and delight when we see that God is wise in how He progressively revealed His plan.

The mention of God's wisdom and knowledge and judgments and ways and His mind all highlight God's wise plan here.

Ultimate glory goes to Him because He formulated & is orchestrating a plan where it is obvious that from Him and through Him and to Him are all things so to Him be glory forever, amen.

If I made a plan where you looked for everything to come from me and through me and resound back to me, that would be bad.

That would be bad because I'm not big enough or powerful enough to be able to handle it and I'd disappoint you & fail you again & again.

But it's also bad because I am not the source of all good & only the source of all good should be finally trusted and thanked.

So though it would be wrong for any of us to function like this, it is right and even loving for God to function like this.

It is good and loving of God to show Himself as the One to seek for goodness because He's the only One who can give it.

And our enjoyment of goodness is expanded when we respond with praise so even that is good for us.

That's just a little reminder why a God-centered approach to life is not only right, but it is also happy and loving and good.

And that's also why it's good for us to think and learn and behold God's glorious wisdom—it's for our joy!

We feel more security when we see His wisdom & trust Him.

But why did I have you turn to the end of Romans 11?

First because it celebrates God's wisdom like we want to do today as we understand and apply Romans 16:25-27.

But also because it celebrates God's wisdom in response to the mystery mentioned in Romans 16:25.

Read Romans 11:25-32 that leads up to verses 33-36. [READ]

What's being celebrated next about the wisdom of God?

It's this plan in verse 25 called the mystery that God would stop mainly working with Israel for a time to reach Gentiles.

In Christ's coming, God began a new phase of history where He set aside Israel—partially hardened them, meaning most didn't trust Jesus.

But God's merciful plan was to turn to the Gentiles, meaning non-Jewish ethnic groups, and save many of them in Christ.

Yet that was not a total and final rejection of ethnic Israel, as Paul has argued throughout Romans 9-11.

No. The church became a mix of some Jews and mostly Gentiles together was a way of showing that salvation is all and only by God's grace no matter what the ethnic background.

But that was in order to make Jews jealous to want to embrace their Messiah Jesus so that in the end, God would again save Israel.

That's God's plan of redemption that lit Paul's jets and sent him through the roof in praise of God's wisdom.

That's what happened here in Romans 11:33-36 and then again in Romans 16:25 as he ended the letter with this spark of praise.

And what's especially praiseworthy is that Jesus is the One who brought Jews and Gentiles together into one new unified body of spiritual brothers and sisters called the church.

Jesus could indwell these estranged enemies by the Spirit individually and corporately so that they functioned together in unity.

Yet He could do it in a way that did not nullify His promises to Israel as Romans 9 explained and Romans 11 solidified.

God will keep His past promises to Israel in the future, but in this time He has brought Jews and Gentiles together in Christ.

And He's done it in a way that none can boast over others.

He warned against boasting in Romans 11 and again in Romans 14-15 when he addressed the differences of those different backgrounds.

How God revealed all this to cut out all boasting is astounding!

This mystery revealed should lead us to unity as His people now by anchoring us together in praise and trust of His wisdom.

Now I would like to have you turn to a number of other passages about the mystery of Christ & the church, but we need to move on or I may not finish Romans before September. ☺

So let me refer you to Ephesians 3:1-12 for study on the mystery defined as Gentiles coming into the promises in Christ alongside Jews.

And Ephesians 3 follows the second half of Ephesians 2, which celebrates the one new man that has formed in the church from formerly alienated, separated Jews and Gentiles.

But now turn back to Romans 16 & see again how Christ is at the center of it all & that will lead us to our 2nd point.

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

So this mystery is now manifested—with the now meaning the coming of Jesus Christ and His Spirit revealing these things by the Apostles.

The focus on this new time and new revelation is Jesus Christ.

That's why this is connected in verse 25 to the preaching of Jesus Christ and why the glory in verse 27 goes to God through Jesus Christ.

That same word for manifest used in Romans 3:21 of Christ's coming as the time God's righteousness was manifested.

Christ's coming showed God's righteousness & displayed the Gospel.

So Jesus Christ is the center of history—that's the point.

And as the 2nd Person of the Trinity who came to earth to be the God-man Savior, it's only right that Jesus should be the focus, isn't it?

So again we should stop and marvel at God's wisdom in how He planned all this—we see again here how God is wise.

We saw, #1, God is wise in how He progressively revealed His plan.

Now, #2, God is wise in how He centered His plan on Jesus.

#2, note that God is wise in how He centered His plan on Jesus.

In 1st Corinthians 1-2, Paul explained his role as preaching Christ crucified though that may seem like foolishness to some.

But God ordained the simple, clear preaching of the Gospel of Christ as His wisdom and that's how He saves souls.

And in 1st Corinthians 2:1 & 7 he described this message of Christ as the mystery now revealed.

So 1st Corinthians 1-2 also put Christ's coming and work at the center of God's revelation and His mystery and plan.

Turn to Colossians 1:24-27 to see another place where Paul mentioned this mystery and pointed it especially to Christ.

Read Colossians 1:24-27 with me. [READ]

Verse 27 says the mystery is Christ in y'all—you plural, meaning you Gentiles that make up the church.

The mystery is Christ dwelling in His people gathered together as one new people of God in the church.

That phase in God's plan was hidden before but is now revealed as the time between Him bringing His Messiah Jesus through Israel & His future salvation of Israel through Jesus.

And that between phase is now with Jesus as the head of His church.

So #2, God is wise in how He centered His plan on Jesus.

And to intertwine our 1st two points, look back at Romans 16:26 and note that God is now using the Scriptures of the prophets as part of how He is now making known the Gospel of Christ.

Though the fullness of God's plan was not clear in the past, Romans 16:26 still affirms the usefulness of the Scriptures of the OT prophets for teaching God's plan now.

So this was hidden in OT times, but it can also be found in OT texts.

Read Romans 16:25-26 yet again to catch that twist. [READ]

It may sound like a contradiction to say the mystery was hidden before Jesus and then say you can study the mystery from the OT prophets who came before Jesus, but it's not a contradiction.

The issue is that the Scriptures of the prophets did contain predictions of Christ's coming and glimpses of blessing for the Gentiles and they were mostly in the shadows before.

But now we can see those more clearly because of the full light of Christ that shines and lights up all of Scripture.

And it makes sense that we can certainly find kernels of these truths tucked away in many places throughout the OT.

In Romans, Paul himself used the OT repeatedly when wanted to prove a point fulfilled or illustrate a truth.

He quoted OT texts about the Gentiles receiving grace several times & he used Abraham and David in chapter 4 as examples of OT saints being saved by grace through faith alone.

So here's the thing that can help you read your Bible better.

When we say that this mystery was hidden, it does not mean God did not give clues and hints about it along the way.

God did reveal to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.

And that's a clue to the worldwide spread of blessing through the ultimate Seed Savior who was promised in Genesis 3:15 to crush Satan in the end.

So God had promised and planned to save Gentiles as well as Jews; He just had not revealed exactly how He would do so.

Even when God gave His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, He called them to be a kingdom of priests in Exodus 19:6.

That implied that they represented God to other nations & would be His instrument to lead the nations to Him.

That happened in Jesus who came as Israel's Messiah.

And we could mention the pictures of redemption in the Exodus and of atonement in the sacrifices and much more through Israel's history and ceremonies that point to clear NT Gospel truths.

For example, you younger kids learned in Sunday School recently about the priest confessing Israel's sins over the head of one goat and sending that scapegoat out into the wilderness.

Do you remember how one goat was killed and the other was sent away and how the one sacrificed represented a substitute killed for our sins & the scapegoat that went away represented our sins taken away?

Then in Isaiah 53 are clear descriptions of Christ's death.

And I could go on with other passages, but we need to remember also that Isaiah and other OT prophets often did not understand exactly what their descriptions pointed toward.

They had enough to look forward to, but it was not clear.

1st Peter 1:10-11 tells us how the OT prophets “made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.”

That was 1st Peter 1:10-11 and it tells us that the OT had enough hints and clues to highlight the coming of Christ and the glories of the Gospel, but it was not clear to them.

All that can be helpful in knowing how to read your Bible.

And it can also help us appreciate God’s wisdom in how He progressively revealed His plan.

He gave them enough to keep His people hoping and trusting, but He did not give them more than they could handle at any point.

He revealed enough, but not too much to spoil the story.

But God’s wisdom in planting hints and clues along the way should make us read our Bibles with excitement at what we may learn.

We should not think of how outdated or disconnected those old stories or ceremonies are to us today.

We should look at them as revealing our one true God and leading to our glorious Savior Jesus.

And that’s how these 1st two points are intertwined.

We see that God is wise, #1, in how He progressively revealed His plan and, #2, in how He centered His plan on Jesus.

Then 3rdly & lastly for today, note that God is wise in how He governed His plan from outside of time.

#3—God is wise in how He governed His plan from outside of time.

I get that point from the emphasis on God as eternal in verse 26 yet as the One who gave the commandment to reveal His plan.

Verse 26 says this all was according to the commandment of the eternal God—meaning there is truth pointing to this mystery throughout the OT because the eternal God was revealing it.

This was not a mystery to God—it was not hidden from God and He was not sitting around waiting for it to unfold.

God doesn’t wait like we do because He doesn’t live bound by time like we do and He doesn’t lack knowledge of the future because the future is just like the present to Him.

It always makes my head spin when I think about God’s eternity and how the past, present and future can all be seen by Him as He exists outside of that sequence of moments.

We can’t even begin to grasp that because everything we know is counted by time and related by time and bound by time.

But God is not.

Yet from outside of time, He governed every event and detail in time and He revealed just the right amount of His plan at each point along the way as He gave commandment to His prophets.

Isn’t that amazing?

That’s what I mean by this 3rd point that God is wise in how He governed His plan from outside of time.

That’s what we glean from the little phrase ‘the commandment of the eternal God’ in the midst of all this discussion of what was hidden or happened at various points in time.

God is eternal and He is eternally wise.

So be in awe of Him and praise His wisdom.

God is wise in how He progressively revealed His plan.

God is wise in how He centered His plan on Jesus.

And God is wise in how He governed His plan outside of time.

Do you see His wisdom and praise Him?

Do you trust His wisdom and want to follow Him and obey Him?

That starts by trusting and treasuring Jesus Christ as the center of God's revelation of Himself.

It starts by turning from your own way of living to follow Jesus as your only hope to have your sins forgiven & be made right with God.

Start with faith in Jesus and then seek Him in His Word.

And as you do, praise God that you can have a Bible.

Praise Him that we now have the NT.

Praise Him for whatever His Spirit has illumined to you so that you understand the truths of Scripture and are not left in the dark.

Praise Him that you understand even more as you seek Him by faith and apply yourself to studying the Scriptures.

God could have left us in the shadows but we have so much we can see and be riveted and changed by.

God is wise.

God is supremely wise.

So praise Him & ascribe all glory to Him & seek Him & obey Him because you see how wise He is and want to follow Him.

Pray with me that we will respond to how wise God is as we close.