

**How God is Wise, Part 2—Romans 16:26-27—7/21/2013**

**Copyright by Mark Vaughan 7/2013**

Keywords—God, glory, missions, faith, salvation, outreach

Today we come to my last message in our sequential series of studying verse-by-verse through Paul's letter to the Romans.

I think it's message #176 in the sequence or #183 with reviews.

Peter Giraudeau suggested the bulletin say, 'Part 2A' just to joke that it wasn't the last one or Greg John suggested naming it 'Part 2 of 3'.

I have learned so much studying each week and preparing to explain & apply the truths in this rich letter to my life & yours.

I appreciated the value of Romans as a summary of NT theology before this study, but I treasure it far more today.

16<sup>th</sup> century Bible translator William Tyndale agreed.

In his 1534 edition of the English NT, Tyndale wrote, "Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal & most excellent part of the NT, & most pure [gospel] ... & also a light & a way in unto the whole scripture, I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it by rote but also exercise himself therein evermore continually as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too oft or study it too well: for the more it is studied the easier it is, the more it is searched the more precious things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid there." [in R. Kent Hughes, *Romans*, 305]

Well said for his time & today—as with all Scripture, this letter offers a clear interpretive perspective on our world & history.

It is a manual to answer society's ills & humanity's questions & if you only master this letter, you will be well equipped for the Christian life.

You will be ready to proclaim truth and defend the faith.

You will be ready to rest in Christ & fight the fight of faith against sin & be anchored in hope for the future with clear help for relationships.

In fact, though this is my last message in this series, I'm sure I will come back often to refresh our minds with these themes.

I may preach some reviews & overviews of the themes & the flow of the book just so we can step back & appreciate the big picture.

But if there's one way to culminate our series, it is to study today's topic of ascribing glory to God.

It is fitting to climax this book with praise to God for His power and wisdom so that all glory goes to Him.

God designed everything from the broad scope of history to the finest details of individual salvation to display His glory.

That is, He made it all to show how wise and powerful and good and faithful and holy and just and merciful and loving and gracious He is.

All of creation and every aspect of life and death and salvation and eternity is a canvas on which God is painting His glory.

God is showing how supremely good He is in all ways and He is orchestrating it to make it clear that He alone is the source of good.

And particularly we pick up again this week with a focus on His wisdom in how He is doing all that.

Last week we continued in the doxology of Romans 16:25-27.

To begin verse 25, Paul extolled God's power in how He is able to establish people in Christ by the Gospel & His Word.

Then Paul turned to God's wisdom in how He revealed His plan in His Word through history & how He centered that plan on Jesus Christ.

He governed all that from outside of time as the eternal God.

So we marveled at God's wisdom in 3 ways last week and we'll add 3 more ways this week as we finish out Romans 16:25-27.

Let's read Romans 16:25-27 again to begin today. [READ]

Last week we said God is wise (1) in how He progressively revealed His plan, (2) in how He centered His plan on Jesus & (3) in how He governed His plan from outside of time.

We know the focus of these verses trends toward giving glory to God for His wisdom because that's the end of verse 27.

It's not certain whether Paul emphasized God as the only God and the wise God or as the God who alone is absolutely wise.

But probably he was highlighting God's supreme wisdom and God as the only source of true wisdom as the only wise God.

From the mention of the mystery in verse 25 on through verse 27, Paul is leading us to admire God's wisdom in all He is and has done.

So that's our goal—to worship God for His wisdom.

I closed last week with a mention of how seeing God's wisdom and praising Him also leads us to trust His wisdom in our lives.

As we see God's wise work in the centuries of His big story, we are drawn to trust His wisdom in our stories too.

God is writing little sub-plots of His grand scheme with the daily narrative of the stories of our lives.

And sometimes we don't like God's story for us.

Sometimes we don't care for what He has written in our past or what scene He is directing as the movie of our lives plays out.

We're all tempted with discontent or questions or confusion as we struggle to trust God when we can't fully see His plan.

So it's helpful to step back & take in the broad perspective that God is wise in the story He is portraying in all He has created.

It's helpful to recall that this is God's story highlighting God's Son who stepped into time to become a man and be the Savior.

Those applications flow from what we covered last week and lead us into 3 more thoughts on how God is wise this week.

The next thought on God's wisdom is drawn from where God has made known His Gospel revelation according to verse 26 so read that again—Romans 16:26. [READ]

To what extent has God made known His Gospel revelation?

To all nations.

God has sent and is sending His Gospel revelation not only to ethnic Jews who are descended from Israel as His nation of promise.

God also has sent and is sending His Gospel to the ends of the earth, to all the ethnicities as the Greek 'ethnay' denotes.

God has chosen to spread His Good News to all the nations.

So as a 1<sup>st</sup> point today in worship of God for His wisdom, note #1, God is wise in how He planned to reach all people groups.

Point #1—God is wise in how He planned to reach all people groups.

If you've heard before that God loves the world and Jesus has sent Christians to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, this may sound so familiar that your jaw isn't dropping yet.

But it is truly amazing that God planned to reach all nations and how He planned to reach all nations.

We talked a bit about this last week, but remember the history of God's workings in the world.

In the beginning as recorded in Genesis, God accepted the offering of one son of the first couple and rejected the other son's offering.

God accepted Abel's offering, but did not accept Cain's and Cain got angry and killed Abel, didn't he?

So God cursed Cain and his was not a story with a happy ending.

Yet God chose to bless another son of Adam and Eve named Seth, which means he was put with them in place of Abel.

And God passed blessing down the line of Seth to Enoch who walked with God up right into heaven one day and never tasted death.

And Genesis 5 records that each generation had other sons and daughters, but we're not told about them except that by the time Noah was born, everyone did only evil continually.

Everyone had gone their own way to live out the evils of their hearts and the whole world deserved to be judged by a global flood.

But Genesis 6:8 says Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

And by that grace, God saved and blessed Noah and preserved the human race through his family through the flood.

Just by considering that far in the history of the world, do you begin to get the sense that God was not rescuing everyone?

Abel, not Cain. Seth not others. Enoch not others. Noah not others.

Do you see that God is not required to show anyone mercy.

So when any individual or people group receives mercy, it is a shocking wonder we should celebrate.

And history went on with the choice of Abraham in Genesis 12 from all the families of the earth and then Isaac not Ishmael and Jacob not Esau and so on.

But in God's choice of Abraham and in God's choice of Israel, He also gave a promise of blessing to all the families of the earth.

So God had a purpose of mercy for all nations that finally came into fulfillment with the coming of Christ.

Turn to Romans 15:8-12 to see this purpose celebrated for all nations.

Read Romans 15:8-12 to see this unfolding purpose that blossomed forth in the coming of Christ. [READ]

Recall that this was a mystery hidden and yet OT verses like Psalm 117 had pointed toward this spread of worship among all nations.

But this was a shock to the Jews who had experienced favored nation status with God for 2000 years.

We read last week of that mystery in Romans 11:25 that God had planned to partially harden Israel for a time until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in during this new phase in His plan.

But mercy to all other nations was not expected as if God was required to dole out mercy to everyone despite their rebellion.

Mercy was just that—it was mercy, meaning it was not deserved, not what justice would judge, not what merit-based pay would give.

That's why Romans 11 illustrates the grafting of Gentiles into the Jewish root of promised blessings as all of God's grace.

And that's why a repeated theme in Romans is that Gentiles never have a reason to boast over Jews nor should Jews boast over others.

And that's why Romans 9:23-24 describes saved Jews & Gentiles as vessels of mercy that God prepared for glory.

It was God's initiative, God's kindness, & God's plan.

And it was wisely done this way so Romans 3:29 could remind us that God is not the God of Jews only, but also of Gentiles.

God is the God of all nations because He is the only wise God.

But here's the catch for you and for me as we consider God's wisdom in how He planned to reach all people groups.

He did it in this way to show that all good comes from Him alone and He gives it only by His grace and not because we earn it or deserve it.

God did not owe it to us to send Good News our way.

And that should lead us both to marvel at His wisdom and to gladly tremble before Him with gratitude if we have received mercy.

That means that out of all the people alive in the world today, if you have a Bible, praise God for that gracious privilege!

It means that out of all the people in history who went their own way, if you have heard that Jesus rescues us from our own way, praise God!

Be struck with awe over the blessings you have!

God planned to reach all people groups in such a way through history in Christ that the only sensible response is amazement at His mercy.

So if you see His wisdom and treasure His mercy, then worship Him and never cease to thank Him.

And realize that God's global outreach focus is for our own good also.

We are happiest when we are not thinking about ourselves.

So as we've watched the *Dispatches from the Front* DVDs in our Wednesday evenings together this summer, it's been so helpfully convicting to see Gospel ministry in other parts of our world.

It's been challenging to see the passion of Christians in other places for duplicating themselves and spreading the Gospel.

And part of our embracing God's wisdom in His plan is us reaching others here and around the world by going & giving & praying.

So again we see how God's wisdom brings His love to us.

And by the way, note God's wisdom also in timing the salvation of the nations after the coming of Christ to bring the greatest glory to Christ.

The shift in His focus at the coming of Christ extols His glory.

The timing & all related to God reaching all nations is supremely wise.

So that's a 1<sup>st</sup> point to admire about God's wisdom—#1—God is wise in how He planned to reach all people groups.

2<sup>nd</sup>ly, note that God is wise in how He designed saving faith to work.

#2, God is wise in how He designed saving faith to work.

Look at the last words of verse 26—'leading to the obedience of faith.'

All this was toward obedience of faith as the goal.

And that phrase "obedience of faith" packs in so much to appreciate.

Paul used that same phrase in Romans 1:5 to open with his purpose as an Apostle.

Romans 1:5 says, “through [Christ Jesus] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake.”

Paul's purpose in Romans 1:5 was bringing about obedience of faith and Romans 16:26 tells us that is also God's plan.

But what is the obedience of faith?

I think Paul sums up his teaching both on salvation and on sanctification in this phrase.

Salvation comes by faith alone, not by works of the law.

Salvation is not a works for wages arrangement.

Paul wrote about that earlier in Romans 4:4-5 so turn there.

Read Romans 4:4-5. [READ]

To be credited righteousness, to have your spiritual account measure up, you cannot approach God to get what is due based on your works.

If you want what you deserve, you will go to hell.

But if you believe—which means trust and have faith—in God who justifies the ungodly, God will count your faith as righteousness.

That is, if you approach God as a spiritually needy beggar, not trusting in anything you have or can earn, but trusting only in the Person and work of Jesus, then He will give you grace.

Then He will give you not what you deserve but what Christ deserves.

That's the amazing Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

But God also commands us to believe that and so faith does obey God's command.

In Acts 16:31, for example, when the Philippian jailer cried out, “What must I do to be saved?”, Paul gave the command to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

So there is a sense in which faith is an act of obedience.

And in that sense, the obedience of faith can refer to that first step of obedience that is faith.

Of course, that step of faith is not a work that deserves God's blessing.

Instead, that faith is itself a gift of God's grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches that in saying, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; & that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Faith is not even out of ourselves; it is the gift of God.

God gives faith as a gift and yet faith is also obedience to what God commands as our response to Him.

So God gives what He commands.

And that shows God's wisdom because all glory goes back to Him even in our response to Him.

It must be that way because we depend on God for all good.

So the nature of faith is that it looks away from self to God.

Faith is dependence & trust on God in Christ instead of self and that by definition cannot be meritorious.

Faith cannot be something we conjure up to make ourselves worthy.

Faith is an attitude of heart that God gives where we rest our hopes on Him & bank eternity and every day on Him.

And again we see the wisdom of God here because faith should never be something that leads to boasting in self.

The only boast is in God's grace, in God alone.

God so wisely designed faith to be His gift and yet our own response of dependence on Him.

So He is the source & to Him be glory as the only wise God.

And yet true saving faith also produces further obedience.

It could be easy to think that if it all depends on God then we can just keep on sinning and it won't matter.

But turn to Romans 6:1-2 to read where Paul answered that. [READ]

Romans 6 raises that possibility that grace would allow us to keep on sinning because salvation depends all on God's grace.

But Paul quickly cut out such a possibility. Not at all.

Romans 6 explains how the new life of faith in Christ awakens us to living under God's grace as our new master.

Salvation by grace does not mean that obedience never matters.

It does mean that obedience does not get us right with God.

But it also means that being right with God motivates us to obey.

That's the thrust of Romans 6-8—that obedience is motivated by grace through faith, by seeking God for His grace as we trust who He is and what He has said.

So the only true faith is one that actually trusts and follows and obeys.

And that's how the phrase, 'the obedience of faith' also highlights the obedience that comes from faith.

Faith is often imagined as a cloudy feeling aimlessly floating around.

But true faith is active to depend on God & it acts on that dependence by obeying God.

True faith—as James 2 says, always produces works.

Or as Jesus put it, a good spiritual tree bears good fruit.

So see God's wisdom in how He designed saving faith to work—marvel that God designed faith both as the way to save & sanctify us.

God designed faith as the channel through which He brings life and through which He changes our lives.

God designed faith to be active and to produce obedience.

And Romans 12 reveals that the Gospel riches taught up to that chapter should call for serious, thoughtful, radical obedience.

Romans 12 begins that call by appealing to the mercies of God.

The clear commands that follow are motivated and empowered all by the mercies of God in the Gospel.

That's how the obedience of faith is different from all other paths of self-trusting, self-generated obedience.

God designed faith to be a response that leads to obedience.

God designed faith in His promises to open the channel of grace to pour forth the power to obey Him.

God designed saving faith to produce sanctifying obedience.

Saving faith in Christ leads to obedience to Christ.

That's God's wisdom in the obedience of faith.

That's point #2: God is wise in how He designed saving faith to work.

God is wise, #1, in how He planned to reach all people groups.

And God is wise, #2, in how He designed saving faith to work.

Now 3<sup>rd</sup>ly and lastly, note that God is wise in how He points all things to His glory through Christ.

#3, God is wise in how He points all to His glory through Christ.

We've already developed this last week and this week by framing up this doxology as moving toward glory to God.

And last week we discussed how the Gospel and revelation and all of history centers on Jesus Christ.

But let's read Romans 16:27 again to finish this up. [READ]

As we said last week, because God is the supreme and only source of good, it is right for Him to direct all glory to Himself.

If I did that, it would be wrong and bad for everyone.

But because God is the source and standard of all that is desirable and valuable, it is right and good for Him to do this.

And it is also loving of Him to do so.

It would not be loving if God did not point people to what is best.

Even when unbelievers reject God, they do so with enough knowledge in creation and conscience to know God is there.

So it's their fault, not God's fault, that they are lost.

But it is God's mercy when anyone is saved to see His glory.

And it's God's wisdom to come up with these intricate purposes for the universe He created.

It's His wisdom to do it all in a way that rightly points to Him.

And as the Trinity—as God in Three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—it is right and good for glory to be through Jesus Christ as the Person of the Trinity who came to earth as a man.

It is wise for glory to come through Christ because He is the One who earned salvation by His life, death and resurrection.

And it is right and good for this glory to redound & abound forever.

Amen means 'so be it' or 'may it be fulfilled' or 'truly.'

And surely, truly, certainly, faithfully—it will be done that the only wise God gets glory through Jesus Christ forever.

God is and will be rightly praised for His wisdom because He prepared and directed every detail to serve its purpose in exactly the way that will finally glorify Him.

So 3<sup>rd</sup>ly, God is wise in how He points all to His glory through Christ.

The sum & conclusion of Romans leads to the glory of God.

The issue is that God will be glorified, as Romans 9 notes, both in showing His wrath and power and in showing His mercy and grace.

And His command to you today is to run from His wrath and seek Him for His mercy.

He has revealed that He will show grace to those who come to Him through faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

We are all sinners who deserve eternal punishment in Hell.

But in place of our guilt and shame and condemnation, God offers freedom and forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has shown how loving and gracious He is in coming to earth to die in the place of sinners to suffer that wrath for us.

Jesus has shown His victory over sin & death in His resurrection.

So the question is how you will glorify God.

Will you glorify Him willingly and gladly as His child who has turned from self and sin to trust and follow Jesus?

Or will you glorify Him as an object of His justice, receiving what your life earned in the fires of punishment forever?

God will be glorified through Jesus Christ forever.

What will be your part in it?

The Gospel has been made very clear to us in this letter of Romans.

What have you done in response?

As you see God's redemptive story unfold, where do you fit in it?

Have you bowed the knee to His wisdom over your story & turned from trying to write your own story to trust Him?

He makes beautiful endings out of even the worst beginnings.

Will you trust Him and His infinite wisdom?

If we can help lead you to respond the precious truths of the Gospel and it's applications from this letter, please let us know.

And if you are trusting God through Christ, then consider what you are doing in response to His plan to reach all peoples.

What are you doing to tell others?

Are you embracing His plan to use you to spread His glory?

You have the training & resources & support in this body to do so.

You don't have any excuses for not reaching out even if it's just the daily routine of evangelizing your own children.

You have neighbors and coworkers and friends and relatives who will glorify God either in wrath or mercy.

Will you tell them the good news of Jesus?

Will you study and master and memorize and share even this one book of the Bible and be equipped to proclaim Christ?

I pray you will, by His grace and for His glory.

Pray with me as we close.