

# Unending Praise

The Final Doxology – Part II

Romans 16:27

## Introduction

How do you end a study like this? It has spanned six years and two months, with breaks, of course, for Christmas and Easter and summer series.

Our study through Romans began in our former church building down the street. Since then, we have added a lot of people to this flock and the ministries have multiplied in depth and breadth in more ways than we could ever count.

Many of you have begun coming to this church sometime in the last six years while we have studied Romans. In fact, if you began attending Colonial sometime during the exposition of the book of Romans, would you please stand.

Contemporary church growth advisors are telling pastors through satellite conferences and magazine articles that if they do not address the trends and topics of contemporary culture; if they are not clever and state-of-the-art and non-confrontational; if they do not discover what their community wants to hear and then deliver it – like some ecclesiastical delivery service – the church will never grow. Those of you who stood – in fact, nearly half the population of our church family – have proven that advice false, if not downright dangerous to the integrity of the gospel and the character of the church.

May I tell you though, as a personal aside, that I am so blessed to be your pastor/teacher. I am actually very spoiled. So many of my contemporaries pace their studies, wondering what to preach that will build attendance and interest their audience. I have had the welcome reception of preaching the next chapter and the next verse, and sometimes the next word in scripture.

I must confess that I was influenced by this corrupt church growth advice early in my ministry. Colonial was about three years old at the time I can remember walking around my study asking that rather deficient question, “What text can I preach that would be interesting?”

I had preached through Nehemiah, James, and the Gospel of Mark, which were observably exciting and interesting books. Now, however, having only

recently finished the Gospel of Mark, I was in a quandary. What would the congregation be interested in hearing? What is interesting to preach from scripture?

I will never forget that moment when the Spirit of God convicted my spirit, as if I had just been electrocuted. I stopped pacing and froze. I did not hear an audible voice, but to my mind came the searing, piercing question from God’s Spirit, “Who are you to say what of My word is interesting? What do you know about My word to ask that question?”

I immediately remembered Paul’s reminder to another young pastor named Timothy, as he wrote,

*All scripture is . . . profitable . . . (II Timothy 3:16a)*

All of it. All of it!

So, the next Sunday, September of 1988, we began with Genesis chapter 1 verse 1.

I have a copy of that first sermon and on page one of my notes, I told the congregation about what happened in my study and what we were going to embark upon. I said, “Today, we are going to begin a book-by-book study of the entire Bible. I can almost hear the sighs, ‘Uh oh, this sounds kind of long.’ Well, I don’t know how long it will take [to get through the whole Bible], but I imagine it will take somewhere between five to seven years.”

If I were a prophet, I would have been stoned to death long ago for making a false prophecy.

Instead, seventeen years later, I am blessed as a preacher of the word. I have been able to have carved into this pulpit, not the latest sound bite, not the latest anecdote, but the truth upon which this church is built – the scriptures alone.

I am deeply grateful for you – you have made it easy for me to fulfill my divine calling to preach the word, in season and out of season; that is, when it is acceptable and when it is unfashionable.

You have joined me in this quest for truth. We have been able to grow together and discover together that in His word, He is revealed. In this

revelation, there is light and hope and strength and life.

So what better way to reach this particular milestone in our journey together than by ending our study of Romans right where Paul ended it – praising and glorifying the Chief Shepherd of the church, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ?

## Paul's Doxology

If you were with us in our last session, we began the final doxology of Paul in Romans 16:25.

These are moments when Paul probably raised his eyes toward the heavens and uttered great, inspired “doxas,” or doxologies. There have been several throughout this letter to Christians living in Rome, Italy.

When Paul finished declaring that the promises of God to Israel would not go unfulfilled, he breaks into his first doxology and writes, in chapter 11,

***For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)***

As Paul wrapped up his teaching in chapter 15, he stops and lifts his heart toward heaven and writes,

***Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. (Romans 15:33)***

Then, as Paul finished sending his greetings to the saints in Rome, he again cannot help but stop and offer a doxology of praise to God as he writes,

***The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Romans 16:24)***

Now, with uninhibited praise in one final, lengthy doxology, the great apostle seems to say, “And now it is time for the very last word – the final song of praise to the glory of God.”<sup>i</sup>

In our last session, I reminded you that the word “doxology” comes from the Greek word, “doxa,” which originally meant “opinion”. Some of this etymology lingers on. So when you praise someone, you are expressing your opinion that they are worthy of praise.

Paul says, “This is my opinion of God!”

Look at Romans 16:25-26.

***Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according***

***to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;***

“This is my opinion of God!”

In our last session, we divided this doxology into four stanzas. Paul praised God for:

- His might;
- His message;
- His mystery;
- His ministry.

Now, in one final exclamation point, Paul ends with these magnificent lyrics,

***to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:27)***

### 1. Paul says first that God is exclusively incomparable.

Paul's praise is first to God, but wait – it is to the only God!

***to the only wise God . . .***

Every other God is a dead stump or rock or figment of the imagination. Our God, as revealed in scripture, is the only God.

Paul is not writing this doxology to his favorite God; to his God of the month; to the God who had the most followers; to the God receiving the most favorable press on the planet.

We live in an era in which we hear about many faiths; people of other faiths. Ladies and gentlemen, while it might be increasingly politically incorrect to say it, there are not many faiths – there is only one faith. All others are speculations; myths; man-made religions; false hopes.

There is only one Lord and there is only one faith (Ephesians 4:5).

There are false Christs and false prophets (Matthew 24:24).

There are false apostles (II Corinthians 11:13).

There are even false visions (Lamentations 2) and false brethren (Galatians 2) and false teachers (II Peter 2).

We do not say that there are many Christs in the world today, because there is only one true Christ.

In the same way, centuries earlier, Isaiah wrote,

***Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am***

*the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.*

*Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; . . .*

In other words, to any other god out there, show your face.

*. . . Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. . . .*

*Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none. (Isaiah 44:6-8)*

Paul sings his doxology to the exclusively incomparable God.

For those of you who are looking for the perfect gift, there is one that perhaps speaks more of our world than gift-giving. It is a doll that comes in an attractively packaged box, with exciting information printed on the front and sides and back – but the box is empty.

The online *Wall Street Journal* article that I read recently, talked about “Invisible Jim” – an action toy man that no one can see. “As Jim’s box describes him, he is ‘completely devoid of darting eyes’ and [has] non-gripping hands as ‘not seen on TV.’ . . . ‘camouflage suit sold separately.’”

The reporter wrote, “Of course, the notion of paying something for nothing has taken a minute to catch the imagination, . . . but interest recently has taken off as increased media attention has helped improve Invisible Jim’s visibility.”

For about three dollars, you can buy your own. This toy – or the box, I should say – is being distributed by a New York wholesaler and is set to make a splash at gift shows this summer.

Rather tongue-in-cheek, the *Wall Street Journal* article came with a headline that read, “Invisible Jim Proves That Even Nothing Can Sell.”<sup>ii</sup>

Imagine this – a media splash; great packaging; innovative marketing, and people are buying an empty box.

There is only one faith – one true God – and everything else is an empty box. Do not be fooled by innovative marketing; do not be lured by beautiful packaging or a media splash.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you follow a gospel other than faith in Christ alone, you are following a

false gospel that will lead you to hell; if you follow the gospel of Christ, you will go to heaven,

*. . . for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . . (Romans 1:16)*

Paul wrote,

*to the only wise God . . .*

In other words, God is exclusively incomparable.

Why does Paul make the reference to the particular attribute of God of His wisdom?

Perhaps it is because it is the wisdom of God that has so designed and accomplished the plan of redemption, that is outlined, illustrated, and expounded in this letter to the Romans.

You might say, “But there are other religions of great wisdom. Look to the east – the orient, which is venerated for its wisdom.”

All truth originates in the wisdom of God, for He is truth. To the extent that anyone speaks the truth, he is speaking the truth of God, whether he knows it or acknowledges the source of truth or not.

Jesus Christ said,

*. . . “I am the way, and the truth, and the life . . .” (John 14:6)*

You might say, “But the religions of the orient preceded Christ.”

Religions may have preceded the birth of Christ, but they did not precede the declaration of the gospel.

The gospel was given to Moses and it was preached to Abraham. The coming Messiah was promised to Adam and Eve. When Noah disembarked and from his three sons the nations of the world were born, they had the gospel; they knew the truth of the gospel.

Everywhere and in every religion, there are kernels of similarity – kernels of truth. These kernels may lead to false conclusions and error, but every religion includes elements of the truth.

A Chinese believer in our church handed me a couple of sheets of paper a few weeks ago when she was on her way to a Bible study. She was showing her students the wisdom of God, found even in the Chinese characters and ancient words of the Orient.

The Chinese word for “creation” is made of four symbols – the symbol for dust plus the symbol for life plus the symbol for mouth plus the symbol for motion equals creation. Kernels of truth can be seen in the fact that the dust from the ground plus the

breath plus from the mouth of God plus motion equals creation.

The Chinese word for “forbidden” is made up of three symbols – the symbol for a tree plus another tree plus the symbol for command equals forbidden. Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but because they disobeyed the command, they were ultimately booted out of the Garden of Eden and kept away from another tree, known as the tree of life. Two trees and a command from God equal forbidden.

One more example is in the Chinese word for “righteousness,” which is made up of only two symbols – the symbol representing a person or “me” and above that symbol, the symbol for a lamb. A lamb over me equals righteousness.

This is the wisdom of God – not in kernel, but in whole, in Romans:

- chapter 1 – the wisdom of God in the gospel;
- chapter 2 – the wisdom of God in judgment;
- chapter 3 – the wisdom of God in justification;
- chapter 4 – the wisdom of God in His promise;
- chapter 5 – the wisdom of God in His peace;
- chapter 6 – the wisdom of God in His free gift;
- chapter 7 – the wisdom of God in our union with Christ;
- chapter 8 – the wisdom of God in our security;
- chapter 9 – the wisdom of God in His mercy;
- chapter 10 – the wisdom of God in evangelism;
- chapter 11 – the wisdom of God in Israel’s future;
- chapter 12 – the wisdom of God for our transformation;
- chapter 13 – the wisdom of God in government;
- chapter 14 – the wisdom of God in His grace;
- chapter 15 – the wisdom of God is seen in His church;
- chapter 16 – the wisdom of God is seen in His glory.

*to the only wise God . . .*

He is exclusively incomparable.

## **2. Paul says secondly, God is entirely accessible.**

Paul goes on to sing, in Romans 16:27,  
*to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ...*

It is only through Christ that the triune God can be known. Christ, equal with the Father, of the same divine essence, took on human form (Philippians 2) and came to earth so that we could behold the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

One day, when you and I will look upon the face of God and live, we will be looking into the face of Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

It is only through Christ that the triune God can be worshiped. He is the only mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5). He is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:24). It is only through Christ that the God can be approached, explained, enjoyed, worshipped and embraced.

Jesus said,

***I am the door, if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved . . . (John 10:9).***

Do you remember when Jesus Christ was about to leave His disciples and in the upper room, He revealed the truth that He was about to leave and go back to the Father (John 14:4-10)?

Jesus said to them, “And you know the way where I am going.”

Thomas responded to Him in a way that every one of us would, saying, “Lord, we do not know where You are going and we certainly don’t know the way there.”

Jesus answered, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Then Jesus added these words, “From now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”

This time it was Philip who spoke up and said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we’ll be satisfied.”

Jesus said, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?”

Later Paul will explain that Jesus is the image of the invisible God – the Father and the Spirit are invisible members of the Godhead, while Christ has taken on fleshly form.

Jesus added, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”

In other words, do you want to know what God is like? Watch Jesus Christ.<sup>iii</sup>

Do you want to see God the Father one day? You will be looking into the face of Jesus Christ.

One author and child psychologist, by name of David Elkind, told of a time that he was visiting his middle son's nursery school class, at the request of the teacher, so that he could observe the class. He wrote,

*It so happened that I was sitting and observing a group of boys, including my own son, who sat in a circle nearby talking.*

*One child said, "My daddy is a doctor and he makes a lot of money and we have a swimming pool."*

*Another child chimed in, "My daddy is a lawyer and he flies to Washington and talks to the President of the United States."*

*Yet another boy said, "My daddy owns a company and we have our own airplane."*

*Then my son said something that could not be topped by any of them. He pointed in my direction and said, "My daddy is here."*

It is one thing to talk about the glory and splendor and majesty and power of our Father who might be a universe or two away – so what?! It is another thing to say, however, that through Christ, our Father is here!

Do you want to fellowship with the triune God? Then fellowship and walk with and talk to God through Jesus Christ.

We do this instinctively when we pray to our heavenly Father and end our prayer by saying, "In Jesus' name, Amen."

We are coming to God through Christ;

We are coming to God in Christ;

We are coming to God by way of Christ;

We are coming to God because we can – through Christ.

Through Jesus Christ we can say, "Our Father – is here!"

### **3. Paul says thirdly, God is exceedingly commendable.**

Paul goes further in Romans 16:27 to say, *to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. . . .*

So our God is:

- exclusively incomparable;
- entirely accessible;
- exceedingly commendable.

Since He is the only true God,

And since He is sovereign in His wisdom,

And since He has redeemed us through Jesus Christ,

Can we do anything less than consider Him worthy of all glory?

To Him be the "doxa" – this is our opinion of God. He is worthy to be praised.

"In your opinion, Paul, how long is God worthy of praise?"

*. . . forever[!] . . .*

This doxology will never end. It is unending praise. It is never ceasing glory and honor to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ.

It will be our joy, without the impediment of sin and self, to give Him:

- Unending praise;
- Unending glory;
- Unending submission;
- Unending preoccupation;
- Unending service;
- Unending affection;
- Unending gratitude.

What more can we say?

### **4. Paul says finally, God is the God of truth.**

Paul has one final word in Romans 16:27,

*. . . Amen.*

This is not a word Paul just threw in because he was a good Baptist.

What does it mean to say, "Amen"?

The word is actually a Hebrew word, transliterated into Greek and English, and into nearly every other language. No matter where I travel, Christians use the word "Amen".

In the Bible this word means "truth".

It is used of God as the God of truth – literally, "the faithful [the Amen] God" or the God of Amen (Deuteronomy 7:9).

God's word is sure, or literally, His word is "Amen" (Psalm 19:7).

When “Amen” is said by God, it means, “It is so and it will come to pass.”<sup>iv</sup>

When we say “Amen,” we are saying that what God has said is the truth and we will bring it to pass – we will obey it; we will honor it; we will submit to it.

“Amen” means, “Right on!” That sounds like the 1970s!

“Amen” means, “I’m with You!” “I agree!”  
“It’s the truth!”

“Amen” is a verbal commitment that says, “Let’s live it out!”

## Conclusion

Paul comes to the end of this great revelation of God in His grace and glory – not just of this final paragraph, but of this entire letter to the Romans – and he says, as it were, to the God whom he has revealed, “I agree . . . I’m with You . . . it’s the truth . . . I will strive to live it out!”

Oh that we might do the same.

Oh Lord, help us to not be hearers of the word only, but doers; to learn from this letter and then say with Paul, “Amen . . . it’s the truth . . . we agree . . . by Your grace and power, we will endeavor to live it out!”

Thank you for the apostle Paul. Thank you for the book of Romans. Thank you for the church which You redeemed. Thank you for this church which You have uniquely blessed. And above all else, thank you for You. You are the only wise God, and through Jesus Christ, we have come to know You and give You glory, both now and forevermore. Amen.

Thus ends our exposition of the wonderful book of Romans.

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<sup>i</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, Romans: Volume 4 (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 189.

<sup>ii</sup> Cassell Bryan-Low, “Invisible Jim,” <http://www.startupjournal.com/ideas/retailing/20010615-bryanlow.html>, 2006.

<sup>iii</sup> James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 4 (Baker, 1995), p. 1972.

<sup>iv</sup> W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 45.