

## Romans 16:25-27 The doxology and a summary of Romans

We are all on a journey, but where are we on that journey? And, what is God doing in your life? We have been journeying through the book of Romans, and this morning we come to the end of this particular journey. Romans has been a bit like climbing a mountain, and we have reached the top! At the top of a mountain, if the weather is good, you get a panoramic view. We are going to look back over the hills and valleys of Romans we have been travelling along, a brief summary.

But before taking a panoramic view let's look at the doxology. Climbing mountains can be frustrating because you think you have reached the top, but then you have to go a bit further, and a bit further, and a bit further! The ending of Romans is like that, and it's a bit untidy. The observant will realise that Romans 16:24 is missing from our modern Bibles, but is found in the footnotes. This is because some manuscripts end at 16:24, without the doxology. Other manuscripts put the doxology at the end of chapter 14, or chapter 15, or both! While most manuscripts have a format as in our Bibles, these alternatives cannot be ignored. Some have suggested that the original Romans ended at the end of chapter 14, and Paul added chapters 15 and 16 later, which is possible. Many think it is likely that the doxology isn't Pauline, and was added later to tie together the loose ends of Romans. While I think this is very possible (also for theological reasons), nevertheless the doxology, *"in many ways forms a worthy ending to Paul's most weighty epistle"* [Cranfield].

The doxology can be summarised, *Now to him who is able to establish you according to my gospel ... be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ. Amen.* This is the gospel that has been kept secret for long ages, but has now been made known through the prophetic writings, to all nations, at the command of the eternal God, in order to bring about the obedience of faith. All this ties in well with Paul's opening comments in chapter 1, where he speaks about, 1) the gospel that was promised beforehand through the prophets in the holy Scriptures (Romans 1:2); 2) his ministry to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations / Gentiles (Romans 1:5); 3) his longing to visit Rome to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen / establish (same word) the believers.

The doxology neatly concludes Romans. But it can also be seen as a very brief, but full sweep of Biblical history. After the creation and fall God promised a Saviour (Genesis 3:15), a promise that was repeated again and again throughout the prophetic writings. Then God sent the angel Gabriel with a message to Mary (Luke 1:35) as He began to fulfil His promise. This is why the doxology is used as an advent reading in the Anglican church.

Let us now get our spiritual binoculars out and from the summit survey the book of Romans. Paul is writing to a congregation in Rome (rather congregations, see Romans 16,) of Jewish and Gentile believers, although as Apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 1:5, 11:13) his main focus is towards the Gentile believers.

**In chapter 1**, after his opening salvo from Habakkuk 2:4 that righteousness from God comes by faith (Romans 1:16-17), Paul describes the Greco-Roman pagan culture from which many of these Gentiles believers had been saved – a culture which increasingly describes our own culture, a culture under the wrath of God.

**In chapter 2&3** he shows from the Scripture the human predicament, the root of the problem, which is sin. As a result we are all subject to God's judgment. It matters not who you are, Jew or Gentile, religious or secular, all are under the power and sway of sin (Romans 9,12,23). But now a righteousness from God has been revealed, apart from law, but spoken about in the law (the

prophetic writings), that is, the righteousness (being put right with God) that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (Romans 3:21-22).

**In chapter 4** Paul illustrates from the life of Abraham that this righteousness doesn't depend on being Jewish (i.e. being circumcised, i.e. through works of the law<sup>1</sup>,) because Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised. Those who have faith that God raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 4:24-25) share in the same strong faith that Abraham had (Romans 4:20).

**In chapter 5** this justification by faith leads to peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we rejoice, even in suffering. While we were weak (in faith) Christ died for the ungodly and reconciled us to God (Romans 5:6-11). Paul shows that sin came into the world through one man Adam, the representative head of fallen humanity. Justification has come through one man Jesus Christ, the representative head of redeemed humanity. Believers are no longer in Adam but are *in Christ*. Where sin once increased, now grace abounds all the more leading to eternal life (Romans 5:20-21).

**In chapters 6&7** those baptised into Christ have been united with Him in his death and resurrection. We should consider ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). We are not under the condemnation of law even though we continue to struggle with the flesh (sinful nature).

**In chapter 8** there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). If we yield ourselves in the obedience of faith it leads to a life of holiness and peace. This is the way of the Spirit as opposed to the way of the flesh ((Romans 8:6). We are God's adopted children and the Spirit within us cries out *Abba Father* (Romans 8:15). We suffer in this present world, not knowing how to pray as we ought. Indeed, the whole of creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth. But our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us in the age to come. All things work together for the good of those who love God and have been called according to His purpose, and nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

All these are thoroughly biblical and Jewish ideas. Indeed, Paul's most common phrase in Romans is, *It is written*. But what about the Jews, who have not believed, the descendants of Abraham, to whom the oracles (the promises) of God were given (Romans 3:1-2)? The temptation for the Gentile believers was to think they had replaced Israel in God's purposes. (This replacementism did indeed become dominant, and is with us today.)

**In Romans 9-11** Paul reveals his deep burden and heart longing for the salvation of his brothers according to the flesh (Romans 9:1, 10:1). He concludes that in regard to the gospel they are enemies. But in regard to election they are still beloved for the sake of the fathers, because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:28-29). Paul was writing before a significant split between Judaism and Christianity. For him Gentile believers had not replaced Israel in God's purposes but were grafted into the spiritual root (the Olive Tree metaphor – Romans 11:17-24).

Paul describes the hardening of Israel as a mystery. But he also understood that God was working out his purposes through the hardening of Israel, to give opportunity for the gospel to be preached to all nations, and then all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25-26).

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<sup>1</sup> I have understood 'works of the law' as a narrow category of works required for a Gentile to convert to Judaism to become a member of the household of God, rather than as a general category meaning all good deeds.

**In chapter 12** Gentile believers were therefore not to become arrogant but to offer their lives as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1-3). They were to serve in the body (Romans 12:4-8) and to prioritise love, especially to their Jewish neighbours, even in the face of persecution (Romans 12:9-21).

**In chapter 13** they were to submit to the wider synagogue authorities, who we should understand as being sympathetic to the Nazarene sect at this stage (Romans 13:1-7).<sup>2</sup> They were to understand that love is the fulfilling of the law, and so walk (in their halacha) accordingly (Romans 13:8-14).

**In chapter 14** Paul is concerned that the unbelieving Jewish brother, the *weak in faith*, be welcomed to the Christian / Messianic meetings, without arguing over disputable matters, (the halacha of the weak in faith, concerning food and special days). That is, the *weak in faith* are those who do not yet share Abraham's strong faith, but are weakened through unbelief (Romans 4:19-20).<sup>3</sup> So, Gentile believers were to be especially careful in what they ate, so as not to offend, but to walk in love (Romans 14:15), so as not to destroy the work of God for the sake of food (Romans 14:20).

**In chapter 15** Paul sums up the hope of the Gentile believers with a string of Scriptures (Romans 15:8-13). He shares his plans to visit Rome, but via Jerusalem first, to pass on the gift he had collected.

**In chapter 16** Paul concludes with personal greetings and a brief warning to avoid those who cause divisions contrary to the teaching you have learned (Romans 16:17). They are to continue in their obedience, remembering that soon God will crush Satan under your feet (Romans 16:19-20).

I have sought my best to teach Romans from what I call an Hebraic perspective. It has included some new perspectives on Paul developed over the last few decades, which I think magnify the gospel of grace which is by faith alone.

It is good to ask ourselves at the beginning of the New Year, *What is God doing in my life?* Hopes, dreams and expectations are good and proper, but we must keep Him at the centre, because, as the doxology says, *He is able!* (cf Ephesians 3:20-21). May He be at the very centre of our thoughts and motivations and affections!

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen*

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<sup>2</sup> The authorities in chapter 13 are normally understood to refer to secular authorities, which they could be. But the advantage of considering them to be synagogue authorities (equivalent to denominational authorities) is that it enables this passage to sit comfortably within the context and flow of Paul's thought. Nearly all commentators are at a loss to explain why Paul should suddenly start speaking about secular authorities at this point in the book of Romans. Well, maybe he isn't, and maybe he still has the unbelieving Jews in mind.

<sup>3</sup> The usual interpretation that the *weak in faith* are Jewish believers, who have not yet shaken off the shackles of the law, fits well with replacement theology (supersessionism). But to believe the *weak in faith* could be Jews who believe in the Lord, but had not yet believed in Jesus as Messiah, is a 'new' perspective that fits neatly with the context of Romans from chapter 9 onwards. From this perspective we see that the unbelieving Jewish community (the weak in faith) and the believing community (the strong in faith - mainly but not only Gentile), and the relationship between these two communities, who are living in close proximity, are primary in Paul's thoughts from Romans 9:1 right through to Romans 15:7.