

Epistle To The Romans: Doxologies Chapters 1:25, 9:5, 11:33-36, 16:25-27

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
The English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Please can I welcome you to this talk from *Truth for Today*, where we are concluding the series on Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Last week my colleague, Jonathan Hughes, took us through chapter sixteen, the last chapter of the epistle, showing us how faithful Christians ought to live the Gospel. Today our talk, entitled "Doxologies", wraps up the whole series, meaning that over the course of many weeks we have covered the most comprehensive of Paul's letters. This last talk on Romans extracts the doxologies from the various chapters in order to consider them in more detail. I ought to say now that all Scripture quotations will be from the English Standard Version. Also I trust that you will not consider me patronising if I begin by seeking to define what is meant by "doxologies." Many times Paul writes to his friends and fellow Christians, describing the breath-taking actions that God has taken, through the Lord Jesus, and the implications of these. Consequently, he often breaks out into a note of praise to glorify the Lord for all His goodness. One example can be found in 1 Timothy chapter 1, where in verses 15 & 16 he tells us that the Lord Jesus came "...to save sinners: of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy..." As the wonder of this tremendous blessing strikes him it causes him to exclaim, in verse 17:

"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

For Paul, the truth that the Lord Jesus should come to this world to save him, the arch-persecutor of the church, was almost too wonderful to be.

There is a briefer example in Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter four and verse eighteen, where the apostle had been telling how God had rescued him from the lion's mouth referring, of course, to his trial before Caesar at Rome. In this verse he emphasises his certainty that whatever happens the Lord will bring him safely into His heavenly kingdom. The contemplation of God's power over his destiny again causes him to utter in honour of God:

"To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."

So now we turn to the doxologies in the Roman letter for a deeper look at Paul's expressions of thankfulness and praise.

Our first doxology is in chapter one of Romans, verse 25:

"...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Paul cannot leave this statement, with its negativity, of how the pagan world had rejected the truth of God, without adding his desire for the Creator to be praised, hence the doxology. We now need

to examine more closely the context that led to Paul's exclamation of praise. As far as I know, this is the only time when the thought of the creator God calls forth a doxology from the pen of the apostle. Speaking personally, and I say this to my shame, it is not often that I dwell upon the wonders and grandeur of creation and the manifold wisdom of God that is wrapped up in the workings of the universe. I am reminded, at this point, of a Christian who was prominent in my youth. He was a humble man with a manual job, in the railway workshops, in the town where I live. Though not educated beyond the elementary stage he retained the deep respect of his fellow workers, because of his faith in Christ and constant, caring, practical Christianity. I remember with affection his comments on Psalm 139 verse 14, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." I have never forgotten the evident delight in this man as he considered the creative wisdom of God. Does such a truth, when it occasionally crosses our mind, cause us to give thanks to the Creator God?

In verse 25, Paul points out the paucity of man's bargain when he exchanged the truth of God, with all the accompanying wonder and majesty, for a lie. As Leon Morris points out, Paul does not consider idolatry one falsehood among many, but rather as **the lie** above all others. Such language emphasises the dreadful sin of idolatry which places someone, or something, in the place of God. A community that worships created things is not on the road to faith in God for, according to the teaching of Paul, they are following a lie. When he points this out to the saints at Rome, Paul then breaks into his doxology to counteract the failure of others to praise the Creator.

It is time now to move onto a verse in chapter nine, where Paul again breaks into a short anthem of praise at the end of a sentence, where he has been discussing Israel's privileges and promises:

"They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 9:4-5).

It was not the law, or the covenant blessings, that caused the Apostle to express a doxology of praise, though I am sure that, even as a Christian, he still valued the spiritual heritage of God's earthly people. Rather was it the mention that as concerning the flesh, Christ had been born from the covenant people of God. Notice the many advantages that the covenant brought, namely the divine glory, the covenants, temple worship, the law and the patriarchs, yet it is none of these that causes Paul to express his prayer of praise to the Lord: "God over all, for ever blessed." It is, of course, the thought that Christ had come into the world. [We could, if time allowed, look with profit at the advantages of God's earthly people, outlined in verse four. I can only briefly look at "divine glory", or the splendour of the divine presence, as the New English Bible renders it. How great was the privilege to behold the divine presence which was signified by the pillar of cloud and of fire in the wilderness.](#) Was it the personal memory of the revelation of the glory of the risen Christ on the Damascus road that called forth the doxology? Perhaps, I ought to remark that despite some scholars being wary of linking "Christ" with "God" in this phrase, I and all at *Truth for Today* accept the translations that state, as does the NIV along with the ESV, that, "...Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen." I have claimed many times on *Truth for Today* and I state again that I am convinced that our belief that Jesus is the Son of God is a crucial part of the confession that makes us Christians.

[Mentioning the Damascus road incident is an opportune moment to add some pertinent comments about Paul's personal pathway. We all find it easier to break out into songs of praise and expressions of thankfulness when we are meeting in fellowship with others of like minds, when it is well with us with no nagging worries or anxieties. Let us pause for a minute to consider Paul's pathway. He was probably writing the letter to the Romans during the three months he was resident in Corinth \(Acts 20:3\). There was much dissension in the Corinthian church, with at least four separate parties, some of whom were rejecting his apostolic authority. In his second letter to](#)

the Corinthians he writes about a painful visit he had had to make to try to bring unity and peace into the assembly. He is forced to boast, despite his dislike of doing so, about his struggles as a servant of the Lord. These struggles included being shipwrecked three times, countless beatings, five judicial lashings from his kinsmen, three times beaten by Roman rods, many imprisonments, being stoned, and suffering hunger and thirst. Separate from all of that was his anxiety and care for the churches that he had founded. None of this was without effect upon his bodily health especially as he grew older. He must have been troubled by physical pain, in addition to “the thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Speaking personally, I would have felt like giving up as a servant of the Lord after one lashing or beating with rods. Not so with Paul, who almost unconsciously added doxologies to his letters expressing his thankfulness and appreciation to the Lord Jesus. He could have truly sung Miss Havergal’s hymn:

Take my life, and let it be,
Consecrated Lord to Thee
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will, and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Now let us consider another of these doxologies, but before we do so, can I welcome any who have just joined us on *Truth for Today*, where we are about to look at a doxology in Romans chapter eleven and verses thirty three to thirty six:

“Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

It has been pointed out many times that the verses preceding this doxology cover a difficult subject. Paul has given some explanation, but to some questions the answer is still not revealed. It is the Apostle’s conviction, however, that the solution will be revealed in God’s time. Consequently, he breaks out into this doxology which could be justly titled ‘The Doxology of the Wisdom of God.’

The Apostle demonstrates his glad confidence that the wisdom and knowledge of God are beyond the limits of man’s mind. The statement of J.B. Phillips that, “Your God is Too Small” could never be used of Paul. We might be guilty of limiting God to that which we can explain. Long before Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, Isaiah was teaching this truth that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts nor our ways His ways (see Isaiah 55:8). The writer of our doxology believed in the immensity of the God and Father of our Lord. I sometimes think that we are apt to construct a God who satisfies our intellect, rather than the God who is revealed to us in the Scriptures, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The rest of the four verses, we are considering in chapter eleven, reveal something of Paul’s understanding of the immutable and omniscient God. Job has said that man can do many things:

“He dams up the streams so they do not trickle, and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light. But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?” (Job 28: 11 & 12).

True wisdom and understanding are not found in the world. It comes down from heaven. There is a personal pathway that we have to find which will please God, there is the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as we travel towards our heavenly home, but however long we travel, or learn of the greatness of God, we will never exhaust those heavenly springs, nor will the divine light ever fade. Paul is so taken up with the immanence and transcendence of God that he almost adds another doxology to conclude his present one. It is well worth looking at verse thirty-six more closely, for here we see the unity of creation corresponding to the unity of the Godhead. Or in other words, all things proceed from God, all things are wrought by Him and all things exist for His glory. I trust that we, along with Paul, can add our Amen.

Having used up much of the time allocated to this talk I must move quickly on to consider the last of the doxologies in the Roman epistle:

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith - to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Romans 16: 25-27).

It is so precious to notice the esteem, love, respect and gratitude that Paul has for the God who redeemed him and gave him life in His Son. He had laboured for many weeks writing this long letter for those Christians at Rome, most of whom he did not know. The benediction, recorded in Romans 16:20, was Paul's prayer for those Christians. The doxology from the sixteenth chapter that I have just quoted was Paul's personal ascription of praise to the Lord.

The apostle knew that he could spend many long hours preaching and teaching the implications of being a Christian, yet in the long run it was only God, the Holy Spirit, who was able to strengthen and fit them for a holy life. In chapter 1:11, Paul informed the Christians at Rome that he longed to see them, to impart some spiritual gift to make them strong in the faith. Now, in verse 25 of our doxology, he acknowledges that it is only God, who will cause us to escape the corruption that is in the world. We live by faith in a world largely indifferent to Christianity; we need therefore to be equipped to deal with the challenges that will confront us in that world.

Paul now testifies to the high place given, to what he calls “my gospel”, in the revelation of the mystery. Paul's Gospel, ofcourse, was no different from that preached by the other apostles, being revealed truth, not human philosophy or man's wisdom. This is what the Apostle means when he writes about the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been made known to all nations. Some expositors of Scripture, whom I greatly respect, suggest that the mystery here refers to the church. From the context, I feel that the mystery appertains to Paul's Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Another example of this is the mystery, mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:16 “great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.” A believer in Jesus must have had that mystery personally revealed to him in order to be a Christian in the New Testament sense. That the Son of God came from heaven to die for our redemption is only truly received by us through the revelation of the Spirit of God.

Another deeply significant point is that the mystery was kept hidden for long ages, but has now been disclosed. The appearance of the incarnate God was not an accident of history. Paul, writing to the Galatians, tells them that “...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,” (Gal. 4:4). It was a definite commission as the Apostle John wrote in his first letter: “...the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4: 14). Also we must notice the word “**now**” in the clause “...but has now been disclosed.” The mystery was a secret belonging to the silence of the eternal ages predating the creation of the universe. What a miracle of grace that enabled many persons at Rome, Philippi, Ephesus,

Jerusalem, Thessalonica and other towns and cities, to acknowledge in the middle years of the first century that the Messiah had been revealed during their lifetime. Also they were among the first of many millions, who over two millennia, had the task of making the mystery known to all nations. Such a mission field meant the despised Gentiles being accepted into the church. I repeat, we must not miss the word “**now**”, as this emphasises the earth-shattering truth that God had dramatically and recently intervened into man’s affairs. The coming of the Son of God in grace was an event that would never need to be repeated.

Paul allocates much importance to the Scriptures in this passage, as he does elsewhere in his writings. He cites here the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament, though some would say that the prophets of the apostolic days should be included. What is evident is that the coming of the Lord Jesus has illumined our understanding of the Old Testament. When the Ethiopian, in Acts chapter 8, was reading the passage from Isaiah 53, Philip was able to point out that it referred to the Lord. Again the two disillusioned disciples walking to Emmaus, (Luke 24: 27), were instructed that there were many passages in the Old Testament Scriptures that referred to the Lord’s sufferings.

There is one more phrase, in our doxology, that I wish to focus on which is so necessary for us all. It has no hidden meaning, therefore even the youngest, most inexperienced Christian can understand. The phrase is “the obedience of faith.” We need to obey Scripture, especially the New Testament. One of the first choruses I sang as a little boy taken to Sunday School by my sister was:

Two little eyes to look to God,
Two little ears to hear His word,
Two little feet to walk in His ways,
Two little lips to sing His praise,
Two little hands to do His will,
And one little heart to love Him still.

Author Unknown

These words might only be suitable for children, but the thoughts expressed are good advice for us all. Such a personal consecration exercise will be easier for us if we appreciate the glory and majesty of the only wise God, which has been revealed to us, on the foundation of what the Lord Jesus has done. The knowledge of God’s glorious Son filled Paul’s heart. I pray that He will fill ours.

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