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Romans #65  
August 21, 2022

## **Strength for Weak People through the Gospel of Him Who is Able!**

### **Romans 16:25-27**

My first sermon in Romans was early in October of 2020. Here we are, nearly two years later, concluding our study of the single most important letter in the single most important book in the world. It has taken us 65 weeks to get here, but I trust that you have found it to be a blessing and an encouragement in your Christian experience.

Although I didn't plan it this way when I started preaching through Romans, I can't think of a better or more glorious passage of Scripture on which to conclude my time as Lead Pastor of Bridgeway than this one. There are so many critically important themes in these concluding three verses in Romans that it feels like an injustice to devote only one week to them. But I'll do my best to focus on what I think Paul would have us to consider.

The concluding doxology consists of five parts that focus on (1) the power or ability of God, (2) the way in which the gospel of Christ can strengthen weak people like you and me, (3) the evangelization of the nations, (4) the purpose of the gospel, namely, "to bring about the obedience of faith," and (5) the praise of God's to whom all glory is due.

#### *(1) God's Limitless Ability to do all that We Need Done*

Have you ever noticed in Scripture how often the ability or power of God is emphasized and extolled? I often think of the question Jesus asked the two blind men in Matthew 9. "Do you believe that I am *able* to do this?" When they responded in the affirmative, Jesus said, "According to your faith be it done to you" (Matt. 9:29). In other words, because you believe I have the power to heal the blind, I will do precisely that.

When a leper approached Jesus he said, "If you will, you *can* make me clean" (Mark 1:40). The leper had no doubts about the ability of Jesus to heal him. He just didn't know if Jesus wanted to. Jesus proceeded to heal the man. Later, the father of a boy who was demonized and couldn't speak said to Jesus, "If you *can* do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (Mark 9:22). Jesus responded by saying, "If you *can*! All things are possible for one who believes" (Mark 9:23). Believes what? Well, evidently he means if you believe that I *can* do this, it will be done for you. Once again, we see that Jesus places great emphasis on whether or not a person believes he has the ability and can do what is asked of him.

Earlier in Romans 4 we read about Abraham who, along with his wife, Sarah, was well beyond the age when they could have a child. But Abraham “grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was *able* to do what he had promised” (Rom. 4:20-21). In Hebrews 11 we read yet again about Abraham who was willing to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice because “he considered that God was *able* even to raise him from the dead” (Heb. 11:19). Paul told Timothy, his spiritual son, that his confidence in God had not wavered because he was convinced that he “is *able* to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me” (2 Tim. 1:12).

We see this emphasis on the power of God to do great things repeated in several doxologies. For example, one that you know well is found in Ephesians 3:20 where Paul declares: “Now to him who is *able* to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” Jude closes his short letter by declaring, “Now to him who is *able* to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (Jude 24).

And then, of course, we have the doxology before us today, the final paragraph in Paul’s magnificent epistle to the Romans. Once again Paul breaks out in praise of him “who is *able* to strengthen you according” to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:25). Clearly Paul intends for his concluding words to be a hymn or declaration or song of praise and adoration of the God who is *able* to do the incredibly glorious and majestic things that have been described in Romans.

Do you believe this? May I suggest that before every prayer you pray you begin by confessing and declaring: “God, I know without any doubt that you *can* do this for me. I don’t presume to know whether you will, as I submit to your sovereign good pleasure. But I know and am confident that you are *able* and that no power in heaven or on the earth can thwart your sovereign purpose.”

## *(2) The Gospel is the Source of Strength for Weak People*

Paul knew what it was like to experience human weakness. When he described his ministry in the city of Corinth he said that he was with them “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). I don’t need to tell any of you what it is like to feel weak and inadequate and overwhelmed. But here is the good news: The gospel can strengthen you! The gospel can empower you! The gospel can supply you with whatever you need to remain faithful to the Lord and to accomplish whatever he’s called you to do.

How, you ask? I’ve got a lot of answers!

Consider your *suffering*. The only way you can suffer unjustly without growing bitter and resentful is tied directly to the way Christ suffered for us and did so without reviling those who reviled him – “when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23; see 2:18-25; 3:17-18).

Or take *humility* as another example. When you are battling pride, remember that the basis for Paul’s appeal that we “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant

than” ourselves is the self-sacrifice of God the Son in becoming a human and submitting to death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:1-5 in relation to 2:6-11).

Husbands, do you feel weak and inadequate to **love your wife**? If so, remember that “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25-33). Think deeply and often on his sacrifice for you and you will find the power of the Spirit to sacrificially love your bride.

Do you struggle to be **generous and sacrificial with your money**? Do you battle greed? If so, remember what Paul said: “you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9; 9:13). Do you see from this how the truth of the gospel is designed to motivate and empower you to be generous?

Is it a tall order for you to **forgive** someone who has offended you or abused you or betrayed you? Then meditate on how “God in Christ forgave” you (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

Do you struggle to **love** the unlovely? Do you struggle to love those who won’t love back? Again, go to Paul’s words in Ephesians 5 where he says that we are to “walk in love” toward each other, “as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Again, it is the truth of the gospel that strengthens us to love when we would otherwise prefer to close our eyes to the unlovely and walk away.

Do you find yourself unwilling to **serve** one another? If so, reflect deeply on how Christ served his disciples by washing their feet and eventually suffering in their stead (John 13:1-20).

If that were not enough, there are dozens of instances in the NT where we are directed back to the reality of the gospel and what Christ has done for us through it as the primary way to combat those false beliefs and feelings that hinder our spiritual growth. So, for example, . . .

- When you don’t feel loved by others, meditate on Rom. 5:5-11; 8:35-39.
- When you don’t have a sense of any personal value, read Matt. 10:29-31; 1 John 3:1-3.
- When you struggle to find meaning in life, study Eph. 1:4-14; Rom. 11:33-36.
- When you don’t feel useful, consider 1 Cor. 15:58; 12:7-27.
- When you feel unjustly criticized, rest in the truth of Rom. 8:33-34.
- When you feel excluded by others, rejoice in Heb. 13:5-6.
- When you feel you have no good works, let Eph. 2:8-10 have its effect.
- When you are constantly asking the question: Who am I? take courage in 1 Peter 2:9-10.
- When you live in fear that other people have the power to destroy or undermine who you are, be strengthened by Heb. 13:5-6; Rom. 8:31-34.
- When you don’t feel like you belong anywhere, take comfort from Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Cor. 12:13.

- When Satan accuses you of being a constant failure, remind him of 1 Cor. 1:30-31.
- When Satan tells you that you are an embarrassment to the church, quote Eph. 3:10.
- When you find yourself bitter towards the Church and indifferent regarding its ministries, reflect on Acts 20:28.
- When you find yourself shamed into silence when confronted by non-Christians, be encouraged with 2 Tim. 1:8-12.
- When you find yourself experiencing prejudice against those of another race or culture, memorize and act upon the truth of Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:14-16; Eph. 2:11ff.; and Rev. 5.
- When you struggle with pride and boasting in your own achievements, be humbled by Rom. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:18-25, 30-31.
- When you feel despair and hopelessness, let Rom. 5:1-10 restore your confidence.
- When you feel defeated by sin and hopeless ever to change, delight yourself in Rom. 7:24-25.
- When you feel condemned by God for your multiple, repeated failures, speak aloud the words of Rom. 8:1.
- When you lack power to resist conforming to the world, consider Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 6:14.
- When you are tempted sexually, never forget 1 Cor. 6:18-20.

And again, when you find yourself saying . . .

- I'm not having any impact in life or on others, be uplifted by 2 Cor. 12:9-10.
- I feel guilty and filled with shame all the time for my sins, be reminded of Eph. 1:7.
- I live in constant fear, be encouraged by Luke 12:32; Rev. 2:9-11.
- I struggle with anxiety and worry about everything, don't neglect the truth of Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:6-7.
- I am defined and controlled by my past, look to 2 Cor. 5:17.
- I live in fear that God will abandon me, consider his promise in Rom. 8:35-38.
- I can't break free of my sins and bad habits, linger long with Rom. 6:6,14.
- I'm afraid to pray and fear that God will mock my petitions, take heart from Heb. 4:14-16.
- I can't find strength to serve others, fearing that I'll be taken advantage of by them, let Phil. 2:5-11; and Mark 10:45 have their way in your life.
- I'm a spiritual orphan and belong to no one, rejoice in Gal. 4:4-7.

Each of these texts refers to the gospel of what God has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and each text applies that gospel truth to the particular problem noted. These, then, are just a handful of the ways that the gospel affects all of life, all of ministry, and strengthens us in everything we seek to be and do and accomplish as Christians and as local churches.

This is truly amazing. God glorifies himself not by putting you down or embarrassing you or mocking you. God glorifies himself by making you strong! He draws attention to himself and his majesty by empowering you to do through his Holy Spirit what you could never do in your own strength.

*(3) The Gospel is for the Evangelization and Salvation of the Nations*

Please note that it is the “command of the eternal God” (v. 26) that we take this glorious, good news to every tribe and tongue and people and nation. In other words, evangelism and mission are not optional! If you wonder why here at Bridgeway we devote at least 12% of our income to missions, both local and global, both to church plants and ministries that make the gospel known around the world, here is the answer.

Why do we care about what our missionaries and church planters are doing in Japan and in the Czech Republic and in Turkey and in India and in England and in Slovenia and in Germany and even here in the ever-increasingly pagan United States of America? It is because this is the “command” of our eternal God!

And how do we do this? It isn't only by contributing financial support. It is primarily through **“the preaching of Jesus Christ”** (v. 25). There is no gospel, no good news, no hope for anything of eternal benefit unless Jesus is made known in our preaching and in our teaching and in our writing and in our conversations over coffee with neighbors. And don't ever think that gospel “preaching” is restricted to apostles like Paul or to pastors like me. This is the responsibility of every Christian man and woman.

So, why do we preach Jesus Christ, as Paul says in v. 25? Why do we not preach social justice and environmental care and nuclear disarmament or any number of other messages that we hear about so often today? We preach Jesus Christ because all the blessings and treasures and benefits and resources and experiences of joy and satisfaction and peace and hope are found only in him. When you get him, you get them! Paul said it in Colossians 2, that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). In Ephesians 3 Paul spoke of “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). It is in Christ that we find “every spiritual blessing” (Eph.1:3).

And what precisely are these riches and treasures that are found only in Christ? Where do I begin? Allow me to direct your attention to . . .

His **immutability**, the simple but glorious truth that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and therefore he is one on whom you can rely always to be there, forever the same, unchanging in his character and kindness.

His **empathy**, the simple but glorious truth that whatever you are facing and whatever you experience, Jesus knows and understands and is always present to supply you with whatever you need to survive and thrive.

His *deity*, the simple but glorious truth that Jesus is himself eternal God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of the Trinity.

His *humanity*, the simple but glorious truth that Jesus is also no less a human being, a man, one who has shown us in his life and in his dependence on the Holy Spirit how we too can exceed our finite limitations to walk and minister in the power of signs and wonders.

His *humility*, the simple but glorious truth that Jesus stooped low to reach us, that he did not count equality with God or the eternal glory that he shared with the Father and the Spirit something that should prevent him from taking on himself the likeness of men so that he might be our great redeemer and Lord.

His *love*, the simple but glorious truth that in spite of the fact that we are all hell-deserving sinners he set his saving affection on us and continues to love us without fail through all the ups and downs and highs and lows of life.

His *beauty*, the simple but glorious truth that in Christ Jesus we see the majesty of the one who is both God and man; we see the glory of the incarnate Word who became flesh for us.

His *authority*, the simple but glorious truth that all demonic powers and every human institution has been put underneath his feet and that because we are in him and are seated with him in heavenly places, they are also subject to us.

His *eternality*, the simple but glorious truth that there never was a time when he was not; that God the Son, who became Jesus, the God-man, has always existed, who said to the Pharisees, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

His *wisdom*, something Paul explicitly mentions here in v. 27, the simple but glorious truth that he never lacks for the best and most efficient and most God-glorifying way to accomplish whatever purpose he undertakes or whatever goal he has in mind.

His *providence*, the simple but glorious truth that it is by the hand of the risen and exalted Christ that the world and all it contains is directed by his power to bring to consummation the kingdom of God in the earth and in heaven; in his providence we can rest assured, as Paul said in Romans 8:28, that he is working all things together for our ultimate good.

His *kindness*, the simple but glorious truth that we see everywhere in the four gospels, as he mingles with social outcasts and forgives repentant prostitutes and tax-collectors.

His **compassion**, which is consistently said in the four gospels to be the reason why he touches lepers and cleanses them, restores sight to blind eyes, gives strength to once paralyzed legs, opens the ears of the deaf and raises the dead.

His **holiness**, the simple but glorious truth that although he was tempted in all things just as we are, he never sinned, not once, but always submitted himself to the will of the Father.

His **faithfulness**, the simple but glorious truth that he always did what the Father desired and that he will be faithful to us to fulfill every promise ever made.

And perhaps most important of all, **his determination to endure the suffering of the cross** and by doing so to exhaust in himself the wrath of God that we so richly deserved and to make it possible for our sins to be forgiven.

Where do I stop? Can I not also mention the treasure and riches of his patience and long-suffering and grace and forgiveness and mercy and tender-hearted ways and his justice and righteousness and yes, even his wrath. All the treasures of glory and power and wisdom and knowledge are in him and only in him. This is why we preach Jesus Christ!

#### *(4) The Purpose of the Gospel is to bring about the Obedience of Faith*

We find in this purpose statement an echo of something we first encountered back in Romans 1:5. There Paul said that he had been granted the grace to be an apostle “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake” of Christ’s name.

The phrase “obedience of faith” may mean one of two things, depending on how one interprets the prepositional phrase, “of faith.” Let me give you another example. If I were to say, “The love of God is the reason why we exist,” how would you interpret “the love of God”? Do I mean our love for God? Am I saying that the reason we exist is to love God? Or do I mean God’s love for us? Am I saying that the reason we exist is because God chose to love us? So, is God the object and focus of our love, or does love originate within God?

In the case of the phrase, “obedience of faith,” the options are slightly different. Does Paul mean that obedience or a godly life issues out of faith? Is he talking about that obedience to God’s will that comes from or is produced by faith? Or does he mean that obedience *is* faith? Belief in the gospel can be described as an act of obedience, as indicated by the parallel phrases in Romans 10:16 (“But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah said, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’”). Either of these is possible, and they both amount to the same thing. That faith in the gospel to which Paul calls us is the kind that obeys. Thus, if your so-called “faith” does not obey, is it “saving” faith?

#### *(5) The Countless Reasons why the Only Wise God is deserving of All Glory Forevermore*

When Paul refers to God as “the only wise God” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:17) he doesn’t mean that there are a bunch of other gods that are foolish and only our God is wise. No. ***There is only one God, and he is infinitely wise.*** He knows precisely what to do in every situation. He is never caught scratching his head, trying to decipher which of multiple options is the most effective way to achieve some goal he has in mind. When you think back over Romans and the multitude of things God has done to achieve our salvation, you can rest assured that the process he chose was the wisest and best way to secure our forgiveness and to exalt his own glory. There was no better way to save us than how he has saved us through Jesus.

So, then, what does it mean when Paul says, “to the only wise God be glory forevermore”? The interesting thing is that there is no verb here in the original text. Literally Paul is saying, ***“To him, glory!”*** Of course, Paul is appealing to us that all glory be ascribed to God alone. But let’s be careful here. When we glorify God or when we give him glory, we are not adding to his majesty or making him more beautiful and honorable than he was before we decided to glorify him. We glorify God by *declaring* that he is glorious. We *acknowledge* it. We *prize* it. We *treasure* his glory. God’s glory cannot increase or decrease. It is eternally infinite, and our task is to *make this known* to the world by means of the person and work of Jesus Christ whom we preach.

***Why is God worthy of our praise?*** Romans contains countless answers to that question, and even then it is only a scratching of the surface of the many things about who God is and what he does that ought to elicit our adoration and exultation.

- Jesus is the Christ who came in human flesh and was raised from the dead (Rom. 1:1-4).
- God calls us into relationship with Jesus such that we truly belong to him (Rom. 1:6).
- God loves us and called us to be saints (1:7).
- The gospel is the power of God for salvation / no other power, no other means, no education or earthly accomplishment can save / only God’s power in Christ (1:16).
- God has revealed himself in nature, thereby rendering all without excuse (1:19-21). In this way we see that he is eminently fair and just in holding all accountable.
- Any and all may be saved, without regard for ethnicity, by faith in Jesus (3:21-24).
- God has provided Jesus as the propitiation for our sins, thereby satisfying the demands of his own justice and appeasing his wrath against sin (3:25).
- God declares us righteous by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (3:23-24).
- God justifies the ungodly (4:5).
- We now have peace with God by faith in Christ (5:1).
- We rejoice in hope of the glory of God (5:2).
- We can now rejoice in our suffering because God has assured us that it will ultimately produce in us a transformed character that endures (5:3-4).
- Our hope in God will never put us to shame (5:5).
- God has poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (5:5).



- Christ died for ungodly people (5:6).
- God's love for us is seen preeminently in the gift of Jesus to die for us (5:7-8).
- The fact that Jesus died for us when we were his enemies is the guarantee that he will live for us now that we are his friends (5:8-11).
- Jesus, the last Adam, has overcome and triumphed through righteousness the first Adam who plunged the race into sin and corruption (5:12-21).
- God has united us with Jesus, as seen and testified to in baptism (6:1-4).
- Because we died with Jesus, we now live with him and are no longer slaves to sin (6:5-11).
- We are no longer under law but under grace (6:14).
- We have been given the free gift of eternal life in Christ (6:23).
- God has enabled us to bear fruit for him (7:4).
- God is in the process and will ultimately bring to consummation our deliverance from the body of death in which we now live (7:24-25).
- There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ (8:1).
- The Holy Spirit now indwells us (8:11).
- We are the adopted sons and daughters of God (8:12-17).
- The Spirit bears witness to us that we belong to God as our Father (8:16).
- God has promised us that we will be fully redeemed and glorified in our bodies (8:18-25).
- The Spirit helps us when we don't know what to pray for (8:26-27).
- God assures us that he is orchestrating all events to make us look more like Jesus (8:28).
- God loved and foreknew us before the foundation of the world (8:29).
- God predestined us to be conformed to the image of Jesus (8:29).
- God called us and justified us and is so certain to glorify us that he speaks of it as an accomplished fact (8:30).
- God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us to guarantee that he will gladly provide us with all lesser blessings (8:32).
- Jesus intercedes for us with God and overcomes every accusation or objection (8:33-34).
- Nothing can separate us from God's love (8:35-39).
- God elected us to inherit eternal life based on nothing other than his sovereign and gracious good pleasure (9:6-22).
- God has assured us and all mankind that if you confess Jesus as Lord and believe God raised him from the dead you will be saved (10:9-11).
- God has determined to save both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, uniting them as one people who will inherit all the promises (11:1-32).
- No matter what may come our way, we can rest assured that all things are from him and through him and to him (11:33-36).

- God has given us guidance on what it means to walk in obedience to him, how to live righteously in a fallen and corrupt world (12:1-13).
- God has assured us that we need not seek vengeance on those who mistreat us as he will bring justice to bear on all (12:14-21).
- God has provided human government as a deterrent to human wickedness and a source of reward and praise for human obedience (13:1-7).
- God has granted us freedom on secondary matters and has urged us not to judge or condemn those who may differ with us on such issues (14).
- God supplies us with endurance and encouragement through the power of the Scriptures (15:1-7).
- God promises to fill us with all joy and peace and hope as we trust what he has revealed in the Scriptures (15:13).
- God has invited us to join him in changing history through prayer (15:30-33).
- God has assured us that we have the authority to resist Satan now and will one day be his instruments by which the Devil is fully and finally crushed (16:20).
- God has promised to strengthen us through the gospel (16:25-27).

All glory and praise be to him who loved us and saved us from our sins!