

Romans: The Practice of Righteousness (part 13 of 13)

Farewell to the Book of Romans

Romans 16:21-27

Mark Vroegop

²¹ Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. ²² I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. ²³ Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. ²⁵ 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 ²⁶ 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— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16:21–27)

The book of Romans has changed the course of human and church history. Its doctrinal content and vision of God has been used by God to radically transform both individuals and local churches and to spark movements of renewal and revival as well. A few examples:

St. Augustine (354-430), one of the foundational thinkers for the Christian faith, came to faith after reading Romans 13:13-14 – “. . . but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” The book of Romans became the anvil on which God broke his heart and the set him free from his bondage to sexual sin. Here’s what he said:

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.¹

Martin Luther, about a thousand years after Augustine, was studying Romans 1:17 – “. . . the righteous shall live by faith,” when he recovered the doctrine of salvation by faith alone and lit the fire of the Protestant Reformation. He said this about the book of Romans:

"Night and day I pondered until . . . I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole scripture took on new meaning, and whereas before the `righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage in Paul became to me a gateway to heaven."²

¹ http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/207/Jesus_is_the_Only_Way__St._Augustine.html

² <https://www.ivpress.com/bible/romans/>

The book of Romans has had a significant impact on people and history. Its theological depth and vision of God have the potential to change people's lives. John Calvin said, *"When one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."* I wonder what your testimony would be as it relates to this historic book. How has God used this book in your life? How has your vision of God, the church, the doctrine of God's grace, or how you live changed in the last two years?

I've loved this book, and I have enjoyed serving as your tour guide as we have plumbed the depths of what the righteousness of God as mediated through faith in Christ is all about. Romans is revolutionary because it shows us that **the righteousness that a righteous God demands is a righteousness that He gives through faith in Jesus Christ.** The implications of that spiritual reality change everything. A person's identity, guilt, mission, relationships, and future are all fundamentally changed because of implications of a righteousness that is given by faith.

Today we are wrapping up the final seven verses of Romans, and I want to use the doxology in verses 25-27 to review some big picture themes in this glorious book. So as we close this study, let's have hearts of gratitude to God for what we've learned, and let's keep coming back to Romans as a church, as small groups, or in our personal studies. We will never outgrow our need for the truths in Romans.

Eight More Names

The book of Romans ends with yet another list of names. The previous list, in 16:1-6, was written to people in Rome whom Paul had on his mind and heart. The list of twenty-six names reminded us about the importance of relationships in the body of Christ. He loved the church in Rome. There were real people whom he had in mind as the book of Romans was being written.

The list of names in verses 21-23 are the people who are with Paul and who are sending their greetings as well. Paul is not the only one who loves this church and desires for them to grow in grace. Despite their distance and the fact that Paul had never visited Rome, there was still a great partnership in the gospel.

What do we know about the people listed? The list identifies key people who were serving in the church at Corinth, where the book of Romans was written (see Acts 20:1-5). That is why Paul uses the phrase "fellow worker" in verse 21. These brothers were serving alongside Paul in the work of the gospel. Let me list for you what we know about these men:

- Timothy was Paul's son in the faith. He joined the second missionary trip team, and he was Paul's closest coworker.³ He was Paul's frequent ambassador, either as Paul's traveling companion, as being sent ahead of Paul, or as being left behind to finish the work of ministry. No one was more trusted by Paul than Timothy.
- We know little about Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater other than that they were Jewish converts ("my kindred"). Jason is most likely the man listed in Acts 17:5-9, who nearly lost his life when a mob in

³ Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Vol. 6. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.

Thessalonica attacked his house, looking for Paul. Sosipater is likely the man listed in Acts 20:4, who was from Berea and who traveled with Paul to Macedonia.

- Tertius self-identifies as the secretary who wrote the letter. Paul likely dictated the letter while Tertius did the work of physically writing the letter to Rome.
- Gaius is the man who Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 1:14 whom he baptized in Corinth. Apparently Paul is living with him, and a church meets in his house.
- We do not know anything about Quartus, and Erastus may be the man listed incidentally in Acts 19:22 and 2 Timothy 4:20. What we do know about Erastus is that he is identified as the city treasurer, which was, no doubt, a position of influence in Corinth.

Once again we see the personal connections that make gospel ministry so beautiful. Even though these brothers were over 700 miles away, they were concerned about the work of ministry in Rome. Do you know why? Because if you love the glory of God in the gospel, you long to see it spread! Whether it is seeing it spread to your neighbors, your city, or the world, the gospel gives you a heart to see more people come to faith in Jesus.

On December 20th we will do something very unusual and very much filled with faith: We will give away an entire Sunday's offering. We do it because we love to see the gospel spread. And even though many of us will never go to Lebanon or Ukraine, our hearts are interested in what God is doing there because we love the gospel. Your love for the gospel means you love what the gospel does – whether it is 70 feet or 700 miles or 7,000 miles away. Theology effects missiology.

Seven Closing Statements

Paul ends the book of Romans with one of the best doxologies in the entire Bible. Verses 25-27 is one long sentence that not only ends the book with a God-center flourish, but also does two other things. First, it functions like a bookend (or *inclusio*) for the entire book. The language and tone is very similar to how the book began. Let's see how similar they are:

*²⁵ 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 ²⁶ 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**— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. Romans 16:25–27 (ESV)*

*¹ Paul, a servant of **Christ Jesus**, called to be an apostle, set apart for the **gospel of God**, ² which he promised beforehand **through his prophets in the holy Scriptures**, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the **obedience of faith** for the sake of his name **among all the nations**, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace **from God our Father** and the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1:1–7 (ESV)*

Second, the doxology serves to give us some highlights of the entire book of Romans. Within verses 25-27 are at least seven statements that are vitally important to the overall book. Let's see what Paul says and take a journey back through the book.

1. "To Him"

The doxology begins where the theology of Romans ultimately leads: an upward focus. The purpose in Paul's writing the book of Romans was not just to communicate important doctrinal truths. He wanted the Roman Christians to understand who God is, what He has done, and what God's acts say about Himself.

The book of Romans is not meant for you to just know more about the depravity of mankind, the beauty of justification, the battle we wage with sin, our union with Christ, or how to live in freedom as a follower of Jesus. Romans is about all of that so that you might know and love and honor God. Romans shows us something about God.

We see the God-centeredness of Romans very clearly in a few places in Romans.

- 1:1 – The very first verse identifies that Paul has been set apart for the gospel of God.
- 1:16 – The righteousness that Paul is celebrating is the righteousness of God. Remember, the theme of this book is righteousness, and you could summarize the entire book by saying "the righteousness that God demands is a righteousness that He gives through faith in Jesus Christ."
- 1:23 – The essence of sin is the exchange of the glory of God for the glory of mortal man, and we learned that this is expressed in all of the brokenness of life, especially in our sexuality. We learned that the most poignant illustration of the rejection of God for one like myself is homosexual activity (see 1:26-27).
- 5:1 – We heard that the beauty of justification is the fact that we have peace with God.
- 8:15-17 – Because of Christ, we are not only forgiven, but we are also considered to be children of God and fellow heirs with Christ.
- 11:32 – They mystery of God's sovereign purposes leave us saying "from him, through him, and to him are all things." God is center of the universe, not me.

The signature text in Romans that really summarizes the entire book and perhaps (as Martin Luther suggested) the entire New Testament is Romans 3:21-26. This passage highlights the God-centeredness of Romans unlike any other passage in the book.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:21–26 (ESV)

I hope that you are walking away from this book with new thoughts, big thoughts, humbling thoughts, and life-changing thoughts about who God is and what He has done in and through the work of Christ. The beauty of the gospel is not just that it saves us from our sins, but that it reconciles us to God. It is a gospel that is “to Him!”

2. “Who is able to strengthen you”

The second closing statement relates to the power of God and the powerlessness of mankind. The beauty of Romans is that mankind needs a righteousness that can only be given by God. The power or strength is not in us because it is our hearts and our actions that are the ultimate problem. My biggest problem is me!

The first three chapters of Romans were particularly dark, as we learned about the utter spiritual helplessness of our human condition.

¹⁰ *as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:10–12)*

¹⁸ *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:18 (ESV)*

²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23 (ESV)*

Even after conversion (as I understand Romans 7), there is still a need for God’s help. We are plagued with no power in and of ourselves.

¹⁵ *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. Romans 7:15–18 (ESV)*

Some of you may remember my escalator illustration where I compared the Christian life to a continual walk that works against the downward movement of the brokenness in the world and in us. The hope of the Christian life is that God will help us. Through union with Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be strengthened to keep walking and to keep fighting with the power that God provides. Successful Christians are not those who never struggle; rather, they are those that never give up.

¹⁰ *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (Romans 8:10)*

²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)*

³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32)*

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)*

Romans show us the beauty and the power of God's strength in and through us. Romans is a reminder that while there may not be any hope in you, there is more than enough hope in God's strength.

3. "According to my gospel"

The strength of God comes to us through the gospel – the Good News that Jesus has made a way for sinners to be reconciled to God. This glorious news is all over the book of Romans:

¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)*

⁸ *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

¹⁸ *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. (Romans 5:18)*

Romans shows us that the gospel is not just a truth that is believed; it creates a new identity as a sinner becomes a son, a rebel becomes an heir, and the condemned are declared forgiven. The Good News is the solution to the problem of mankind. Through Jesus, enmity gives way to embrace.

The gospel, therefore, becomes the central defining reality for those who follow Jesus. Being reconciled to God through faith alone and by Christ alone means that everything about a person is forever changed. We are a gospel-affected people. We now belong to Jesus such that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39).

And it is our hope as we look to the future because *"if God did not spare his own son but give him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"* (Rom. 8:32) The gospel is the means of our deliverance and our hope for the future. The gospel is able to strengthen us now and in the future.

4. "The mystery . . . made known to all nations"

The fourth statement to notice in this doxology is found in verses 25b-26a, and it relates to the mystery of God's plan and the scope of its application. The point here is simply that the Good News was a message not entirely clear throughout the Old Testament. One could see aspects of it, but it was limited in its explanation and application. The Law was given to highlight sin. The sacrifices were offered as a temporary payment for transgressions. And the focus of redemption was the people of Israel. In order to come to God and be forgiven, one had to enter through the nation of Israel.

But the message of Romans is the fact that this gospel has been opened to all peoples, to all nations. God has opened a way for permanent atonement, and His aim is to spread the gospel everywhere. Paul has his sights set on Spain when he writes Romans (Rom. 15:24ff), and he wants the Romans to see the mission of God to reach the nations.

The signature verse for this is, of course, Romans 1:16 – ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*” In Romans 4 Paul cites Abraham, not only as the father of the Jewish people, but as the spiritual father of all who put their faith in Christ (Rom. 4:22-25). And in Romans 11 we learned about the beauty of the Gentiles being grafted into the plan and people of God.

The beauty of the gospel in Romans is not just the depth of forgiveness offered but also the breadth of who becomes part of God’s family. The aim of the Good News is to reach the nations!

5. “By the command of the eternal God”

One of the categories that is created or strengthened in Romans is the sovereignty of God. As you read through the book, especially chapters 9-11, it is very clear that our natural, human definitions of “fairness” and “freedom” are challenged. Romans 9-11 helped us to see that 1) God is the center of the universe and not me, 2) there are divine purposes underneath our lives that are mysterious and mind-blowing, and 3) God operates in categories that are far beyond mine.

Romans shows us that a gracious, loving, and kind God is at work in ways that are beyond our ability to fully comprehend. This book has shown us over and over that nothing happens by accident and that God is at work to accomplish His will. This book should leave you in awe of God and asking the question “Why me?” We were humbled and amazed by the following verses in Romans 9:

¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:15–20)

And when the freedom of God to be God is rightly understood, it leads us to wonder in humble amazement: ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Romans 11:33)* The book of Romans shows us the splendor of God’s freedom to be God. It reminds us over and over that He is God and we are not!

6. “To bring about obedience of faith”

The aim of Romans from the very beginning was to bring about the obedience of faith (1:5), and we saw that most clearly in chapters 12-15. We learned that every believer lives out their vision of the gospel and their view of God through what he or she actually does. In other words, there is a connection between theology and practice, especially in regards to relationships with others.

In Romans 12 we learned that the mantra for the believer is: “I’m yours, lead me, change me.” And we saw how the gospel affects how we treat one another with love, how we deal with persecution, how we respond to the government. And then we also learned that the gospel means that we welcome

one another despite our differences. Romans 14-15 helped us think through theological triage – the difference between an absolute, a conviction, and a preference. We learned that our personal choices always need to be seen in the context of freedom and the effect on other people with the hope that we would *“live in such harmony with one another . . . that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 15:5-6). The gospel creates new relationships among us that become the platform for the ultimate goal of everything in the universe: the glory of God.

7. “Be glory forever through Jesus Christ”

Romans ends with ultimate reality in all of creation. The book ends with the reason why sin is so awful, why the cross was necessary, and where everything in life is headed: the glorification of God. There are few sentences in the Bible that are more important than Romans 16:27 – *“to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!”*

This is, as Jonathan Edwards said, “the end for which God created the world.” This is the aim of the book of Romans and what will be the central reality for all eternity. It is the plan of God to redeem His people from their tragic and treasonous exchange of the glory of God for their own glory. It is the plan of God to apply the righteousness of Jesus to those who by faith trust Him as Lord and Savior. It is the plan of God to orchestrate everything in life so that His people reflect more and more the glory of Jesus. And it is the plan of God that one day this redeemed people, from all nations, will **with one voice** glorify God.

Romans helps us to see the height, the depth, the length and the breadth of that plan. Romans helps us to see the beauty of God’s righteousness and to marvel at the fact that He would give it to those who put their trust in Jesus. Romans opens our eyes to the sweeping implications of this alien righteousness, and it propels us to live righteously, love each other deeply, and to look for unreached peoples who need to be brought into the family of God. The book of Romans can change a person’s life, and that is why it should be read, studied, memorized, and preached. It contains the power of God for salvation.

The famous sixteenth-century Bible translator William Tyndale longed for the people of England to be able to read all of the Bible in their native tongue. When he was executed, he prayed, “God open the King of England’s eyes.” And it wasn’t long until his dream came true as English translations flooded England and changed church history. Tyndale knew that if you want to change a person or a culture, get them the Bible. He wrote the following of Romans: *“It is the principle and most excellent part of the New Testament. . . . No man can read it too oft, or study it too well; for the more it is studied . . . the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is . . . the more it is searched, the {more} precious things are found . . .”*⁴

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⁴ <http://goossengrapevine.blogspot.com/2007/01/significance-of-book-of-romans.html>