

Let's Sing It!

The Final Doxology – Part I

Romans 16:25-26

Introduction

Today, all around the English speaking world, thousands of Christians will raise their voices and sing praise to God. One particular poem has become a treasure in our English language in aiding our worship of God.

This poem was written in the late 1600s, by an extremely courageous pastor who refused to allow the king's mistress to stay in his house when she came to visit. He also demanded that a relative of the king follow through with a marriage proposal to a woman he had propositioned.

Thomas Ken was a pastor, scholar, and author who served at Oxford in the mid-to-late 1600s. He often wrote hymns for his students and encouraged them to sing them in the morning and at evening prayers.

In a 1709 edition of his hymns, in what he called the "Morning Hymn," he attached at the end of the 14th stanza, the words which are now almost universally recognized as the "Doxology".

*Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.ⁱ*

The name "Doxology" comes from the Greek word "doxa". It originally meant, simply, "an opinion". Your opinion of someone was your doxology regarding that person.

Over time, "doxa" came to refer to someone's reputation or power. Eventually, it came to mean honor or glory bestowed on someone.

In the Bible, of course, the One who is deserving of all "doxa," or all glory and all power and all honor, is none other than God. In fact, the word "doxa" appears often in the New Testament as something related to or regarding Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ:

- is raised by the glory of the Father (Romans 6:4);
- is taken up into glory (I Timothy 3:16);
- is at the right hand of glory (Acts 7:55);
- has glory ascribed to Him in Hebrews 13:21, when the writer closes his letter by writing, . . . *working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*
- is referred to as the Lord of glory by Paul and James (I Corinthians 2:8 and James 2:1);
- is referred to in one of the strongest verses on His glory and divine nature – God incarnate – in Titus 2:13, in which all believers are, *looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,ⁱⁱ*

We will see Christ in all His "doxa" – all His glory and honor and power.

In the meantime, our opinion of Him should match who He is.

What is your opinion of God?

What is the reputation of Jesus Christ to you?

What do you think of when you think about God?

A.W. Tozer wrote, “Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, “What comes into your mind when you think about God?” we might predict with certainty, the spiritual future of that man.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It is no wonder that J. I. Packer would challenge the believer, “Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction.”^{iv}

I praise God that we can meet today to elevate our opinion of God together; to raise our perspective of Jesus Christ; to give glory and honor to our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. If there is one thing needed for the church and every believer today,

- it is an eminent opinion of our eminent Christ;
- it is a prominent perspective of our prominent, distinguished, gracious Lord.

After all that Paul has written to the Roman believers; after all the proper theology and practical theology, he now ends with a doxology – and so he should.

Ladies and gentlemen, theology – the study of God – ultimately leads to a doxology. “Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow” is the natural response of coming in contact with our supernatural Lord.

Is it any wonder then, that Paul will end his great revelation of God with praise to God?

The glory of God is the theme of any true “doxa”. It is a declaration of the glory and honor and majesty of God.

Paul’s Doxology

Turn to Romans chapter 16 and let us look at Paul’s doxology.

1. Paul sings praise to the glory of God’s might.

Look at Romans 16:25a.

Now to Him who is able to establish you ...

In the Greek, this is “to Him who is ‘dunameno (δυναμενω)’ or ‘dynamic’”. This word also gives our transliterated word “dynamite”. I like to think of this periodically, since it takes dynamite to break through mountains of disbelief and granite hearts.

Paul is saying, “To Him who is powerfully, dynamically capable of not only breaking through our depraved and blinded hearts, but building and establishing our lives for His glory!”

The word “establish” is used often by Paul. It comes from the original word “sterizo (στηριξαι),” which means, “to make firm; to make stable”.^v

“Sterizo” is the same word that gives our transliterated word “steroids”. We have certainly seen plenty of newspaper reports of athletes who misused steroids and other drugs to bulk up or speed up in order to get an edge on other athletes. However, steroids also have a good use and are often prescribed by the medical community to help someone struggling with some weakness or disability or recovering from a disease.

Now the Roman believers were known all around for their faith, but even though they were famous for their faith, they were not firm in their faith. In this analogy, the apostle Paul is encouraging the believers that as they follow after God, He is able to add spiritual muscle to their ministry; He is able to add firmness to their faith.

So the first stanza of Paul’s doxology is simply this:

- My God is able – even when you aren’t.
- My God is capable – even when you can’t.
- My God is strong – even when you struggle.

Now notice that in order to say, “Now to Him who is able,” means that everyone else is unable. In fact, Paul finishes his doxology with this thought in the last verse, “to the only wise God”.

All other gods are made of wood and stone and earthly things. The gods of this world are takers. Our God is the Giver. In this verse, Paul implies that He gives strength to the weak.

E. M. Bounds, the author of numerous books on prayer in the late 1800s, wrote,

Rising early one morning, I heard the barking of a number of dogs chasing a deer. Looking at a large open field in front of me, I saw a young fawn running across the field and giving signs [that it was running out of strength] – its race was almost run. It leaped over the rails of the enclosed place and came within ten feet of where I was standing. A moment later, as two of the hounds rushed toward her, the fawn ran in my direction and pushed its head between my knees. I lifted the little thing up in my arms and, swinging round

and round, fought off the dogs. I felt that all the dogs in the West could not and would not capture this fawn after it had come to me and in its weakness, had appealed to my strength.^{vi}

Are you running for your life? Run to God.

After all we have learned from everything Paul has revealed in the book of Romans, the first thing Paul wants to sing about is the condescending, compassionate, caring dynamic of God who is actually interested in us and completely capable of helping us to survive life – to firm up our faith – to help us stand.

Praise God for His might!

Sing it with me:

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

So just what does God’s exercise program look like? How does the Christian add fiber to his faith and strength to his stand? How are we established?

This is found in Paul’s second stanza when he moves from his opening lines of praise in glorifying God for His might.

2. Paul glorifies God for His message.

Look at the next phrase in Romans 16:25.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, . . .

First, we have the praise of God’s might and now, we have the praise of God’s message.

Praise God for the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. This phrase, in verse 25, could be translated, “According to my gospel, even the preaching about Jesus Christ.”^{vii}

The gospel is Jesus Christ.

Without the gospel, we would not know God, who is known only through Jesus Christ. Without Christ, there would be no gospel.

The world knows we need good news about the afterlife, but cannot come up with it. Watch their movies and read their books about life after death and angels and the spirit world – they are like young people trying to pin the tail on the donkey while blindfolded; they are like a kindergarten class in which confused children are trying to spell “gospel” with all the wrong blocks.

The gospel is spelled with the blocks, “J” “E” “S” “U” “S”. The gospel is Jesus Christ. As one author put it, “God is the gospel.”

The British pastor and author, J. Sidlow Baxter wrote,

Jesus Christ did not come merely to preach a gospel; He Himself is that Gospel. He did not come merely to give bread; He said, “I am the bread.” He did not come merely to shed light; He said, “I am the light.” He did not come merely to show us the door; He said, “I am the door.” He did not come merely to name a shepherd; He said, “I am the shepherd.” He did not come merely to point the way; He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”^{viii}

This past week, one of the church staff was telling me about being lost and needing directions. They stopped and asked a young man for help. He tried to give them directions, but his directions were difficult and somewhat confusing to grasp. So this kind man said, “Listen, let me get in my car and you follow me. I’ll take you to where you want to go.” So they followed him and he led them there.

In this case, he did not give them a map, he became the map. He did not show them the way, he became the way. They were lost, until he became, for them, the way.

In the same way, the world of humanity is lost – it does not know how to find its way to God.

We cannot get to heaven by Mapquest.

I went to www.mapquest.com and tried. I typed in my address and then, I typed in heaven as the location to which I wanted to go. I had way too much time on my hands! From my home to heaven, I was given directions to:

- Next to Heaven Cabin Rentals, in Tennessee;
- Heaven on Earth Hair Salon, in Iowa;
- Water Heaven Ponds, in Charlotte, North Carolina;
- Horse Heaven Ranch, in Oklahoma;
- Heaven Spa, in Pennsylvania;
- Almost Heaven Gift Shop, in Granbury, Texas.

Then, I was given directions to this one:

- Heaven Earth Deer Horn Health Food, in California (where else?!).

Mapquest never went vertical – I never got off the ground.

The gospel is not as much directions as it is a Deliverer.

In this letter, Paul has revealed to the Roman believers the truth of the gospel as he reveals the glory of God through Christ. Paul, in Romans:

- chapter 1 – writes of the depravity of man and the deity of Christ;
- chapter 2 – delivers the just impartiality of God toward lost humanity;
- chapter 3 – clarifies the redemption of Christ;
- chapter 4 – connects the gospel with the resurrection of Christ;
- chapter 5 – tells of the death of Christ overruling the transgression of Adam;
- chapter 6 – explains the new life of the believer in Christ;
- chapter 7 – reminds that the deliverance of Christ is required in daily living;
- chapter 8 – assures that our victory is in Christ;
- chapter 9 – declares the sovereignty of Christ;
- chapter 10 – demonstrates the invitation of Christ to whosoever will;
- chapter 11 – repeats the promise of Christ to Israel;
- chapter 12 – encourages that the body of Christ is empowered;
- chapter 13 – restates the supremacy of Christ;
- chapter 14 – extends the grace of Christ;
- chapter 15 – exhorts our unity in Christ;
- chapter 16 – exalts the glory of Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, God did not just send a map from heaven, He sent the Messiah.

It is because of Christ that we can sing, “Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow”!

The doxology of God sings the glory of God’s might and the glory of God’s message.

3. Paul sings about the glory of God’s mystery.

Notice the text again, in Romans 16:25-26a.

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, . . .

Many believe that “the Scriptures of the prophets” is a reference to New Testament prophets, and I would agree.

Paul wrote of himself, Apollos, and Peter as “stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Corinthians 4:1). These were among the New Testament prophets who were receiving revelation and delivering it to the church regarding mysteries that had been hidden from ages past, but were now revealed.

Paul further wrote to the Ephesians,

. . . by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:3-5)

Now the word “mystery” conjures up in our minds the idea of something mysterious. We think of secret rituals of ancient religions, and of modern ones.

This is not the idea in these verses. “Musterion,” or “mystery,” is not used for something that is mysterious, but for something that is simply not understood until further revelation from God.

A number of mysteries are mentioned in the New Testament – things that were not understood by Old Testament saints, but were disclosed fully with the coming of Christ and the development of the New Testament scriptures. These include:

- the mystery of lawlessness (II Thessalonians 2:7-8);
- the mystery of godliness (I Timothy 3:16);
- the mystery of the rapture (I Corinthians 15:51);
- the mystery of the kingdom of God (Mark 4);
- the mystery of Christ’s will (Ephesians 1:9);
- the mystery of the faith (I Timothy 3:9);
- the mystery of Christ indwelling believers (Colossians 1:27).

These are mysteries that were unknown in depth by the Old Testament saint, but are disclosed or revealed through the New Testament scriptures.

Even still, we do not understand everything about these mysteries. Debates between solid believers continue to spill ink over the mystery of the rapture and the mystery of the kingdom and the mystery of lawlessness.

We do not understand everything, for even in eternity the wonder of God's glory through these mysteries will continue to unfold. However, we can now debate intelligently because we have a lot of data. We understand so much more than those in the Old Covenant who did not have the unfolding of mysteries by the New Testament apostolic prophets.^{ix}

So which particular mystery is Paul referring to in this verse of Romans 16? Perhaps all of them or perhaps one of them in particular – which I think is the case.

Paul talks about a profound mystery. The profound mystery Paul refers to in Ephesians 5:32 is about the marriage between a man and a woman and then, he writes,

This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

In other words, Paul is referring to the marriage of Christ to His bride – the church.

The profound mystery of the gospel is the inclusion of the Gentile into the family of God. The marriage of God the Son and a predominantly Gentile bride.

There were hints of this in the Old Testament.
Through Abraham,

. . . all the families of the earth will be blessed. (Genesis 12:3b)

Through Isaiah, God told Israel that the Messiah would be,

. . . a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6b)

However, they did not really catch it until the mystery was disclosed through the creation of a church that included and in fact, has been dominated by Gentile peoples.

A ladies' Bible study recently finished going through a study that used my commentary on the book of Ruth. They invited me to come during their last session for a time of questions and, Lord willing, answers. The first question I was asked was, "Since

you wrote your commentary, have you learned anything new about the book of Ruth?

I immediately said, "Yes!"

I had further delved into the reason Boaz would have been open to marrying a Gentile woman named Ruth. It was a marriage that would isolate him from his people and would bring potential scorn and rebuke from his elders. Why would he harm his reputation among his nation by marrying a Moabitess – a former idolater? What would create in him, a desire to trust the testimony of Ruth? Perhaps she was not telling the truth. Why would Boaz believe her faith in God was genuine?

Boaz had seen Ruth's faith firsthand – in the life of his mother, who was a Gentile and former prostitute named Rahab. She was a woman who had risked everything to hide the Jewish spies and then, asked to be counted among them. When the Israelites marched against her hometown of Jericho, she was rescued. Rahab was saved by the people of Israel and later, married an Israelite man. Her faith was genuine!

Boaz, with Jewish and Gentile blood flowing through his veins, would risk everything to marry a woman who probably reminded him of his own mother's testimony. And the Messiah would eventually come from the line of Boaz and Ruth.

The Messiah, with Gentile and Jewish blood flowing through His veins, would one day choose a bride, composed of Gentiles from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Only God could create the myriad of types and illustrations, prophecies and predictions regarding the fulfillment of the mystery – Christ and His bride, the church.

Only God could come up with Christianity – and He did.

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

Praise God for the glory of His might.

Praise God for the glory of His message.

Praise God for the glory of His mystery.

4. Paul praises God for the glory of His ministry.

Look at Romans 16:26b.

. . . [This] has been made known to all the nations, leading to [bring about] the obedience of faith;

The ministry of God is seen and heard through the lives of obedient believers – those who are obedient to the faith.

Paul writes, in this verse, of this ministry, observed by the world, as “obedience of faith”. This is an odd phrase, which only appears one other time in the entire New Testament – Romans chapter 1 verse 5!

We covered Paul’s meaning of this phrase in our exposition of Romans 1:5 six years ago, so let me refresh your memory.

While salvation comes by faith in Christ apart from good works, faith in Christ produces good works. Faith is essential to salvation, and good works are the evidences of salvation. We could say that faith is the attitude that saves; works are the actions of those who are saved.

Paul wrote in Titus 2:14 that the believers are purified for God and are zealous for good deeds.

He wrote in Ephesians 2:10a,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works . . .

Salvation is God’s gift to us and good works are our gifts to God.

When Thomas Ken published his Doxology in 1709, the doxology had this stanza preceding it, which sings of our duty to serve Christ,

Awake, my soul, and with the sun

Thy daily stage of duty run;

Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise

To pay thy morning sacrifice.

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Praise God for the change that comes in a person’s life who trusts the gospel of Christ for salvation.

Fred was a convicted thief and heroin addict, but had been led to Christ in prison by the family of one of his robbery victims. The changes were dramatic.

His original conviction was overturned on a legality and he was released from prison. He joined a church, got involved in an ex-prisoner’s fellowship group, and continued to grow in Christ.

When the time of his retrial arrived, Fred believed that it was his obligation as a Christian to be completely honest in court. To the shock of everyone, he confessed to other crimes in which he had stolen, but had never been caught. He then told the judge he was willing to accept whatever punishment was appropriate.

An awkward silence filled the courtroom, while the judge considered what to do with Fred and his newly-confessed crimes. When the judge announced the sentence, it reflected a wisdom that gave Fred back his life – he was to make restitution to his victims for their losses, with 50% interest, and he was sentenced to 10 years for each robbery, but the judge suspended all of them, requiring no jail time to be served.

For a moment, no one in the packed courtroom moved. Then Fred’s pastor jumped to his feet and shouted, “Let’s sing it!” and proceeded to lead the entire courtroom in the singing of the Doxology.

The *Seattle Times* captured the scene – everyone stood, including little old ladies in spring dresses, girls in jeans, men in business suits, a biker with his motorcycle jacket and helmet, prison guards, and ex-cons, and began to sing the Doxology.

Officials later said that it was the first time a Seattle Superior Court case had ever closed with the Doxology.^x

Conclusion

Is it any wonder that Paul – a redeemed sinner with guilt piled high before God – leads the church, now for 2,000 years, in doing what all of us as redeemed sinners can do upon realizing the glory of God? To all who regularly run into His everlasting arms, we have in our lives:

- the ministry of God given;
- the mystery of God revealed;
- the message of God delivered;
- the might of God provided.

One of the things we love to do when we assemble is to sing the praise and honor and glory of God. Let us sing it together:

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/12/2006 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2006 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.

-
- ⁱ Carol Stream, “The Golden Age of Hymns’ Christian History,” Christianity Today, Issue 31, (1997).
- ⁱⁱ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. By Geoffrey Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 180.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Morgan, Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations and Quotes (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 350.
- ^{iv} Ibid., p. 351.
- ^v The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament (Zondervan, 1998), p. 345.
- ^{vi} A. C. Dixon, quoted by E. M. Bounds in E. M. Bounds on Prayer (Whitaker House), p. 107.
- ^{vii} Thomas R. Schreiner, Romans (Baker Books, 1998), p. 811.
- ^{viii} Morgan, p. 479.
- ^{ix} R. Kent Hughes, Romans (Crossway Books, 1991), p. 309.
- ^x Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, Holman New Testament Commentary: Romans (Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 464.