

Chapter 77

Paul's Doxology

(Romans 16:25–27)

Paul's message is good news; it is a matter for preaching; it is revelation from God. Paul is eager that we should praise God for the message he has been expounding. 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 which has been kept secret for long ages past* ²⁶*but now has been manifested and, by the Scriptures of the prophets, has been made known to all the nations, according to the commandment of the eternal God, for the obedience of faith,* ²⁷*to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory for ever. Amen.*

Paul's first descriptions of his message ('gospel . . . preaching') lead him further into a description of how this gospel was revealed to us.

1. **The gospel comes by a 'mystery' being revealed.** It is 'according to the revelation of the mystery . . .'. Our knowing anything at all of salvation comes by God's grace and goodness to us. We would know nothing of it at all if it were not for God's opening our hearts and minds to his grace. It is a mystery, something that ordinary human ability is unable to know.

2. **For a long time this gospel-mystery was kept hidden.** Paul is thinking of the long ages of human history before the coming of Christ. He knows that the gospel was preached through Abraham and that the prophets spoke of what was yet to come

in the story of the human race. Yet even when the gospel was revealed it was hidden. The prophets had only a dim outline of it. They experienced God's righteousness. They were righteous before God as Abraham was righteous before God through his faith in the promises. But there was a fullness of the gospel that was yet to come of which they had only a small notion.

Why does God keep his gospel hidden for so long? To make it perfectly clear that it is beyond human ability. If men and women were **speedily** able within the history of the human race to experience God's righteousness, they would have claimed some credit for the discovery. The fact that God allows the long ages of history to go by provides a demonstration on the stage of history that man's wisdom is not able to find God. His science, his politics, his philosophies and educational systems, his moral programmes of reform, all revealed their failure, even before Jesus came, to reveal good news from God.

3. The coming of Jesus Christ into history is the turning point of history. 'The gospel-mystery was kept secret for long ages past' (16:25), but now has been manifested (16:26). The manifestation is the coming of Jesus. God's plan of salvation is tied in with Jesus. When Jesus comes the fullness of salvation comes. The Spirit is poured out. Salvation is not viewed dimly from a distance; the kingdom of God draws near. Jesus may be known in a greater way than ever before.

4. Its exposition is to be found in the Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. Once Jesus has come those very same Scriptures are to be used to give a full exposition of the purposes of God. God's plans and requirements are in Scripture. We might be surprised that the full exposition of the gospel is said to be in the Old Testament, but Paul has already said that the Old Testament bears witness to the gospel. So it is 'by the Scriptures of the prophets' that the gospel is taken to the various nations of the world. What Paul and his colleagues do is expound the Old Testament Scriptures,

showing that they predict a Saviour who would bring salvation to the world by coming to Israel. In Paul's thinking the Old Testament is perfectly adequate for this work of spreading the gospel message to the nations.

5. The worldwide spreading of this good news is God's command. From the earliest days it was God's plan to reach the world through a very precise and particular purpose that began with one man (Abraham), one nation (Israel), one tribe (Judah) and one line of kings. The spreading of the message was God's will; it is shared with all nations 'according to the commandment of the eternal God'.

6. This gospel-message looks for a response, what Paul calls 'the obedience of faith' or 'the obedience that flows from faith'. Faith is productive of obedience. It persuades the heart. It touches the will. Faith leads to but does not force obedience.

Eventually Paul picks up from where his doxology started. 'Now to him who is able to strengthen you . . . to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory for ever. Amen' (16:25, 27). The aspect of God's character that Paul sees shining conspicuously in the gospel is God's wisdom. It is the wisdom of God that the angels will admire when they gaze upon the church and see how God's people came to salvation. But Paul wants us to start praising God for his wisdom even now. It is God the Father that he mentions. Glory comes to him **through** the Lord Jesus Christ.

What man or woman could possibly have designed a way of salvation that comes anywhere near what Paul has taught us in this letter to the Romans? It is this gospel that strengthens us against sin and Satan. It is this gospel that reveals the staggering and amazing wisdom of God. One can only 'give God glory' – that is, tell him how his very nature shines through in the way in which he does things. Who can explore his strange design? One can only turn to song and music to express what one feels in one's heart when we see the amazing wisdom of God.

Preaching Through the Bible: Romans

Ordinary language is not enough. Only God is truly wise. He accuses even his angels of folly. The wisdom of mere men and women is foolishness with him. We 'give God glory'. 'Give to the Lord the glory due to his name!' (Psalm 29:2). We tell him and everyone who is willing to listen what we feel about him, and how we have come to see more of what he is like. At the end of Romans we have to say, 'I have seen you in the sanctuary, and beheld your power and your glory' (Psalm 63:2). 'The heavens declare his righteousness and all the peoples give him glory!' (Psalm 97:6).

Immortal, invisible, God only wise
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the ancient of Days,
Almighty victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Commentaries on Romans

There are five commentaries (or sets of commentary) that I think will help expositors the most. Those by John Murray (1959, 1965), Charles Hodge (an old nineteenth-century classic) and John Stott (1994) are well known. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones's fourteen volumes are compulsory reading for expositors although they are not all on a level. 'The doctor' (as he used to be called) was stronger at some points than at others. The best parts are on Romans 1, 3:21–31; 5, 6; and 9:1–14:17. Romans 2:1–3:20 is weaker. Romans 4 is skimpy and the weakest part of the series. Romans 7 is excellent in many ways but somewhat confusing. One has to be a Puritan expert to understand it, and 'the doctor' himself admitted that his understanding of the seventh chapter became clearer to him in his later years than it was as he preached the sermons on Romans 7:13–25. Romans 8 is magnificent but the thread of argument is not rightly discerned in 8:14–17 (although helpful in other respects). The work on Romans 9:1–14:17 is 'the doctor' at his maturest and best.

Robert Haldane's commentary is one of the few that has spiritual warmth and power. It is highly recommended in that respect although its exegesis has to be questioned occasionally. He misses the point in Romans 6 (in my judgement) but is otherwise a marvellous expositor. I grew up on it as a Christian teenager and owe a lot to it for that reason.

There are more! Moo's work (1996) is the best modern scholarly commentary on Romans in my opinion (although I

cannot agree with his approach to ‘the wretched man’ in Romans 7 and it is perhaps too full of scholarly argumentation for the average preacher). My own works on Romans 3:21–5:21 (*Return to Glory*) and on Romans 6–7 (*Living Under Grace*) are in the same ‘undocumented’ style as this book but are much fuller. My work on Romans 8 (*Everlasting Assurance*) has been made available in South Africa (ASL, Pietermaritzburg). At present they are out of print. Calvin’s commentary – the first that he wrote – is full of interest. C.E.B. Cranfield (1975, 1979) lays out the options in interpretation with great clarity. T. Schreiner’s *Romans* (1998) also sets out the exegetical questions in a way that lets us know what questions need answering. His answers are always very orthodox.

Other works are only for the book-aholic: such as those by F. Godet (nineteenth-century French but available in modern translation), Sanday and Headlam (1902, always interesting), C.H. Dodd (1939, sometimes worth refuting), Nygren (1949), Lagrange (French, 1950), Kuss (German, 1957–78, 3 vols.), Leedhardt (1961), O. Michel (1966), Best (1967), Schlier (German, 1977), Käsemann (1980, full of interesting possibilities), Achtemeier (1985), Brace (revised 1985), Morris (1988, a steady and respectable guide), J. Dunn (1988, notable for his ‘new look’ but not reliable as a guide to Paul), Ziesler (1989), C.K. Barrett (revised 1991), Fitzmeyer (1993), A. Schlatter (ET in 1995).