

Romans 16 (Part 2): 25-27 - Strength Through the Gospel

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Romans chapter 16. It's the very last 3 verses of the chapter and I think it's rather fitting that we're going to be talking about this, because this is referred to as the Romans doxology. Some of you may not know what a doxology is. It's basically a word of praise.

When I was a little boy being made to go to church every week, which we were, the church that I was in was—it was semi liturgical and not super liturgical, but somewhat. And every week in the bulletin, we would say a doxology. We would recite or sing a doxology, and we knew that it was a doxology because it said in the bulletin doxology, and it had a little asterisk next to it. That meant that you stand up when you come to that place in the bulletin.

That's the church that I was raised in. Some of you guys are smiling because that's where you came from too. And the doxologies were nice, but we sang or recited them in a rather passionless way, which is the way it is sometimes, unfortunately, in liturgical-type atmospheres or churches.

But to be honest, a doxology is something that just bubbles forth naturally—not because it's in the bulletin or because somebody tells you, now it's time to read the doxology. Let's stand and read the doxology.

That's the way things were when I was a kid. We're now going to stand and read the doxology. Okay. We'd all go, and we were all really happy at that point because we knew church was almost over. And so it's like, now let us read the doxology.

But a real, genuine doxology just says, oh God, You are so cool. Oh, to God be all the glory, all the praise. It usually comes at the end of a biblical letter because I think the writer is just so overwhelmed with God's—just how awesome God is. And not only that, but he even seems to be almost overwhelmed that he's been used by God so powerfully to say something so magnificent.

Have you ever witnessed to somebody? And then you got done witnessing, and you're heading home or whatever, and you're like, was that me? You said things that are like, I don't know where that even came from. And you realize there's

this sense that God used you as a tool, as an instrument of His glory. And you just— all you can do is just go, God, You're just awesome. It's like your own little personal doxology. And that's where these things come from.

Let's read the last 3 verses of Romans chapter 16, again called the Romans doxology. And this is what it says. Verse 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.” (ESV)

Let's pray first, and then we'll get into this.

Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word. As always, we are completely, utterly dependent on You, on Your Holy Spirit, to bring this to life in our hearts and in our minds. And to speak to us, Lord, about how we can apply these things. Be with us, we pray, in Jesus' precious name, amen.

One thing you'll notice about this doxology is a very apostle Paul-like thing, and that is that it's all one sentence. Did you catch that? That's very Paul. He is the master of the run-on sentence.

In fact, people who look into his writings from a grammatical perspective—he makes them crazy because he just keeps talking without taking a breath, you know the kind. That's Paul—he just keeps going.

And he begins this doxology in a way that you would expect a doxology to begin because the first three words are *“now to Him.”*

And that tells you the direction of the doxology, which should be the direction of any doxology because, again, it's a word of praise.

Who are you praising? You're praising God. This is going to be a vertical statement at the very beginning: *“Now to him...”* We're directing our praise upward—to Him, to God be the glory.

That's a doxology. To *“...God be (the) glory...”* That might be all you say, but that's enough because it establishes the focal point, the direction, the aim of where we're heading right with this thing.

Now, whenever we praise God for something, we always get a benefit. In fact, often what we praise Him for are things that benefit us. And it's no different in this situation right here because Paul says, to God who is able, to the One who

is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Isn't this great? “²⁵... to Him who is able to strengthen you...” Suddenly it becomes horizontal. It starts off with praise, but we understand that all this wonder we're praising God for is a blessing to you and I.

And this is what he says—it actually says, “...(He) *is able to strengthen you according to...*” What? He says, my gospel. He doesn't call it “*his gospel*” because he made it up or because he's the only one who preached it. He calls it “...*his gospel*” because he took very personal ownership of it. Because he was the apostle to the Gentiles in the same way that Peter was the apostle to the Jews. And Paul considered that a very important ministry that he had.

And so he took personal possession of the fact that this is the good news that God gave me to bring to you, so according to my gospel and the revelation that God has brought about through the gospel, He is able to strengthen you or make you strong. Your Bible may say establish you instead of strengthen you. Same basic concept. I looked up the word in the Greek. It just means to strengthen and establish, to stabilize.

How many of you need to be stabilized going into 2016? None of us knows what this year is going to hold. We say to one another, have a great new year. Yeah, it's a wonderful thing to say, but none of us knows what this year is going to hold—for the world, for our nation, for where we live in our locality, in our own personal lives.

We just don't know. We need to be strengthened. We need God's strength. And I like the fact that Paul says here that he begins to praise the One who is able to strengthen you. But he says how He strengthens you. He says, “...*according to the gospel...*”

Now, when he says “*gospel*.” He's not just talking about the message of salvation necessarily in the sense that it's like the four spiritual laws or something like that. He's not limiting it.

The Gospel to Paul is pretty much everything he's written so far in the Book of Romans. It encompasses all of the doctrine. It encompasses all of the insights, all of the understanding, all of the revelation that he's given us in the book of Romans. That is the gospel. That is the good news. And he says God is able to strengthen you by that.

And so that's what we're going to look at here this morning. This is what we're going to focus on here: this statement that Paul makes, that we can be

strengthened and made stable, established. That's what established means. I'm established in my faith, right through the Gospel.

And what we're going to ask ourselves here is: *strengthened against what?* I mean, it's one thing for God to say to you and me, hey, I can strengthen you, but our response is, against what? I need to know what I'm looking out for here. Essentially, anything that would come to destabilize you.

And there are basically two things that I want to bring up, and they have different origins where they come from. But the two things we're going to look at here: First of all, the errors of doctrinally bad teaching.

In Paul's day, there was a lot of bad teaching. There were people going around the churches bringing their little heresies along with them and introducing those things into the church—philosophies of man, just stupid stuff.

And we've had 2,000 years to be stupid and to grow stupidity in the body of Christ, and to build doctrines and ideas and thoughts that just aren't soundly founded in the Word of God.

And they're like a wave or a wind that catches people and just blows them away. And they're caught up in these things—all kinds of teachings. And just as there was stuff in Paul's day, there's stuff today.

I could sit and go through all the bad teachings we've seen in my lifetime, but I'm not going to bore you with all of it. Most of you are aware. But it's not as important to be aware of the bad doctrine that's going around as it is to be aware of the truth. Being aware of the truth is what we need to know.

How do we get—because that's what strengthens you against the doctrinal junk that is flying around. So, what's—how do we get strengthened? Well, by the Word—by knowing what's in the Word.

Then when somebody comes along and says, yeah, well, I heard that... We can go, that's bunk. That's not in the Bible. Where did you get that? Well, somebody told me—or I read it on the internet. Oh, well, that means it's true.

But if you know the Word of God, you can say, hey, that's not right. That's not in the Scriptures. And many times, it's very subtle, isn't it? They'll take a concept and just twist it a little bit, and it can really have some pretty devastating effects.

How many times have I told you guys about probably one of the biggest misconceptions in the Word of God? You've all heard it: God will never give you more than you can bear, right? How many times have you heard that? How

many of you have heard that God will never give you more than you can handle?

It's not in the Bible. It's not in the Bible. Everybody quotes it. They sing songs about it, literally. I used to play a song on the radio when I was in Christian radio about God will never give you more than you can handle. It's not in the Bible.

What it says is that *"God will never allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear."* (1 Corinthians 10:13). It doesn't say God won't give you more trials than you can handle. But that's just one of those little subtle twists to the Word.

But what does it do? It causes people to become very discouraged when they suddenly find themselves in a situation that is beyond what they can handle. And they're going, wait a minute—didn't God say He'd never give me more than I can handle? No.

But see, they don't know that. So what do they do? They feel like, well, God hasn't been faithful. And doesn't the enemy want you to live in that camp, where you're accusing God of being faithless and untrue?

Well, I thought God told me He'd never give me more than I can handle. He never said that. He said the opposite. That's what people don't get. Don't turn there, but if you go to 2 Corinthians, chapter 1, Paul very clearly says in that chapter that the trials they suffered while he was on his missionary journeys were far beyond their ability to endure—far beyond their ability to endure.

He said that, we got to the point where we even despaired of life. And that's a fancy way of saying, we thought that we were dead. And then he went on to explain why. He said, but this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead. (2 Corinthians 1:8-9) That's why God will allow those situations from time to time in our lives.

But see, we get broadsided by stuff like that because we believed bad teaching or mistaken or twisted verses from the Bible. Knowing the Word of God is going to make you strong—knowing the Scriptures, knowing what they really say.

And I expect children in the Lord—not children physically, but children in the Lord. And I'm talking about people here who are immature. I expect them to come up to me and say—or come up to you and say—something like, doesn't this say somewhere in the Bible...? That's how they start their question. I expect that.

I don't expect that out of people who've been walking with the Lord for a while. It's time to grow up and stop asking, doesn't it say somewhere in the Bible? and to know what it says in the Bible—to know what it says and where it says it.

And if there was ever a time in the world that you and I have the ability to know what God's Word says at the snap of a finger or the click of a mouse—it's today. We have the ability digitally to search the Scriptures in lightning-fast speed, and there's no excuse for not knowing where something is in the Bible or whatever.

You remember back in the day—how many of you guys had a Strong's Concordance? I remember getting mine back in the 70s. Yeah, I had a Strong's. I had a Strong's! Thing was thick—it was about that thick, and you could hardly lift the thing.

But I was sure proud of it because with it, any verse in the Bible—I could look up anything. It's like, oh, let me look it up. You got your Greek side and your Hebrew side, and everything's got numbers in there, and you look it up in every single thing, and it'd take you forever, you know. And I mean, they were great tools.

What do you do now? I pick up my phone, and I go, okay, Google... I better not do that. Oh, I just—okay, I'm sorry. You know what I mean? And all I got to do is just say—I give it a little piece of God's Word or a little something from the Scriptures, and it comes up with the verse. Just like that. Just like that!

We have no excuse not to dig into the Word today and to know the Scriptures and what they say. Don't think we won't be held responsible.

This generation has more access to the Word of God than any other generation known to man—and the ability to study the Word of God. And we should grow up in our faith and stop asking the question, doesn't it say somewhere in the Bible? It's time to know.

Do you remember what Paul said that the role of leaders in the church is to do for the body of Christ? Let me show you this from Ephesians, chapter 4:

Ephesians 4:11, 14 (ESV)

And [Jesus] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers... so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

“And [Jesus] gave the apostles, (He also) the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (same thing as pastors) and teachers...(Why?) so that we may no

longer be children (Right? so we may no longer be children. And what are children like?), *tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine* (which, of course, has its origin), *by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*" And that sort of thing.

It's time to grow up, body of Christ. It's time to know what the Scriptures have to say, so that we can be strong and so that winds of doctrine don't just hit us and knock us over and carry us away with them. Oh, praise God! I've got a new revelation! But is it biblical? Is it founded in the Word of God?

There are people in the body of Christ who have given themselves permission to believe things that aren't in the Bible. They won't actually verbalize that. They won't come out and say that.

But you can tell by what they believe that they have. It doesn't matter if it's in the Bible or not—they'll believe it. And they've given themselves permission to believe those things.

We have to be people of the Word. We have to be people founded on and standing upon the Word and say, this is where revelation starts and stops. It is only then that our lives are going to be stable and strong, and established. Okay. Doctrine is one of the big areas where we need to find stability, and we find it in the Word of God.

I want to really encourage you guys with the new year, many of you guys make New Year's resolutions and stuff like that. Let me tell you—one of the most important New Year's resolutions you can make is to start reading through your Bible every day and go through the Bible in a year.

And, you know, incredible—all-access that we have today to Bible reading plans. Used to be, just a few years ago, we used to print them up in December around here. Do you guys remember that?

And we'd put them in the info center, and we'd say, hey, we've got some Bible reading plans for you guys. And we were like, here they are. You can read through the New Testament in a year. You can read through the whole Bible in a year. Just check off the little box, read that passage, and you can read through the book.

And we don't have to do that anymore. Because there's this plethora of Bible reading plans out there. Just get on—just Google, Bible reading plan, Reading through the New Testament in a year, Reading through the Bible in a year.

And it'll just—you'll be overwhelmed. If you have the You Version Bible app on your phone, you can pick from dozens and dozens of Bible reading plans.

And it'll remind you every day. And some of you need it. You get that little vibrate in your pocket just to tell you, hey, it's time to read the Word. Time to get into the Scripture.

I want to encourage you. One of the things that I do—even though I'm—you guys know that I'm pretty computer-weird—but I still take pieces of paper. I actually get on my computer, and I take the Old Testament books, and I put them in a column on one side of the paper.

And I take the New Testament books, and I put them on the other side. And then I just tear it, cut it, whatever, fold it, and I put it in my Bible. And I have one for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament. When I read a book, I check it off. I mark it off. Pretty simple.

Then I usually keep one other bookmark that I keep in the book of Psalms. And I'm going through, so in the morning, I might read three chapters in the Old Testament in whatever book I'm going through. And then I'll hit a Psalm. And then I'll go and read one chapter in the New Testament.

And that's my Bible reading program. If I can keep to that, just about a year, give or take, I'll get through the entire Bible. But your mileage may differ. However you go about doing it is yours to do. I'm just throwing out some of these things because it's just important to be in the Word.

Again, the danger of doctrinal errors is one area where you and I need to be strengthened. But what's another one? Life—just living. I mean, waking up in the morning can be perilous in the world in which we live. And all kinds of difficulties, challenges, stresses, and sorrows can hit us—or are waiting to hit us—when we rise in the morning. We can be absolutely blown away by those things, or we can be strengthened and established in our faith so that those things don't toss us and turn us.

I thought what would be good to do is to ask the question: What exactly does the Word of God—or the gospel—offer to believers and to those who face challenges in life?

And so, that's what I'm going to focus on here. Let me put this question up on the screen:

What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of LIFE??
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What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of LIFE??

All right, let's go through this, because these are things that we as believers have that your neighbor, who is an unbeliever, does not have. And this is what makes

you different. If you know these things and are established in these things, you'll be strong in your faith.

What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of LIFE??

- The INSIGHT of WHY we suffer

The first one is, we have The INSIGHT of why WE suffer. We read through the Scriptures. We read the book of Genesis, and how we get to chapter 3—Satan is involved, the fall of man takes place, sin enters the equation of God's perfect creation, and it just messes the whole thing up. We know that. We know that we live in a fallen world.

Do you know that your neighbor, who doesn't believe in the Bible, doesn't know that? They're literally going through life asking, why? Why is it like this? Why is there so much junk? Why is there so much sorrow?

And they know that you know and believe in God. And so, if they don't ask you the question, they want to ask you the question: If God is real, then why is there so much hurt? Why is there so much sorrow? Why is there so much loss? We lose people that we love—why does that happen if this God that you say you believe in loves us so much?

Well, see, they don't have the understanding that you do. They don't have the insight that you do about why we suffer. The fact is, we're living in a fallen world.

Guys, the world that we live in is broken. It's busted. It's not functioning correctly. Do you understand, saints of God, that God never intended there to even be death and sorrow? We're so used to it, we just think, well, yeah, people are born, they live, and they die. Some young, some old, whatever.

Death was never meant to be part of God's created order. Never. He didn't factor death in. Could you really worship a God who thought, yeah, I'm going to make death. That'll be good. That'll be good. Yeah. Really? Death stinks. Death is an enemy. That's what the Bible calls it. And Isaiah says the last enemy to be destroyed is death. God will one day wipe it out. He's going to destroy the destroyer of man.

You know that. Your neighbor doesn't. And knowing it—knowing why these things are happening—gives us strength. Now, we don't stop there. We've got more points to cover here, but it begins there.

Why do marriages fail? Why do people have a hard time getting along? Why do people become thieves? Why do they become drug addicts? Why do we become

addicted to pornography? Why do we love money more than we love people? Why? And why? And why? And why?

Because we live in a sin-soaked, fallen world—a world that has been ravaged by sin. And we know that it's going to touch us. It has touched us. It does touch us every day—sometimes in powerfully traumatic ways, horrible ways. But we know why. Because sin came into the equation. It entered into God's created order.

What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of LIFE??

- The INSIGHT of WHY we suffer
- The KNOWLEDGE that God has a PLAN

But we also know—we have The KNOWLEDGE that GOD has a PLAN.

See, that's something else your neighbor doesn't know—or, if they do, they choose not to believe it. We know that we're not just living in a fallen world; there's a plan underway to resolve the situation—to redeem the things that have been lost. We know that.

And we know that it is powerfully underway because we know that God sent His Son, born of a virgin, to become the sacrifice for sin—to literally bear upon Himself the penalty of our sin so that God could forgive us and then move us forward toward heaven, toward the conclusion of His plan, which is still to come. But we know it's moving along. It's progressing. We know that. We know that.

And knowing it—having that knowledge that God has a plan—gives us strength. It stabilizes us. It establishes us. Right? Very, very important.

What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of LIFE??

- The INSIGHT of WHY we suffer
- The KNOWLEDGE that God has a PLAN
- The UNDERSTANDING that God's love prevails

Next, we have The UNDERSTANDING that God's love prevails. In other words, He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will not abandon us, and nothing can separate us from His love. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Again, your unbelieving neighbor doesn't know that. There is no comfort in their life. Knowing that God has a plan and that He loves me—even in the midst of sorrow that touches my life, the pain and agony and grief that overwhelm me and come like a flood—I know these things. I know that God has a plan. I know

that He loves me, and nothing will separate me from His love. I know that. I understand it. And it stabilizes my life. This is such important stuff.

How do I know it? I know it through the Word of God. I don't just believe it because somebody told me, hey, by the way, God loves you. Oh, great. Wonderful. God has a plan for your life. Thank you. Appreciate that.

I have gotten into the Scriptures, and I know it. I see it for myself. I see God's redemptive plan from Genesis to Revelation. It's underway. It's moving. It's moving! And it's unfolding in front of our eyes.

What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of LIFE??

- The INSIGHT of WHY we suffer
- The KNOWLEDGE that God has a PLAN
- The UNDERSTANDING that God's love prevails
- The TRUTH that He has given us His Spirit

Next, we have The TRUTH that He has given us His Spirit. His Holy Spirit.

This is one of the most incredible truths that God has given us in the Scriptures: that He didn't leave us alone.

Jesus said to His disciples, it's best for you, actually, that I go to the Father, because if I go to the Father, I will send the Comforter. I'll give you the Spirit—the One who will come, who will lead you into all truth. He is, Jesus said, the Spirit of Truth. And that Spirit—the Holy Spirit—is the One who comes to strengthen you and I, to enlighten you and I, to give us all that we need to carry on with life. (John 14:16-17)

God hasn't left you alone to live in this war-torn world. He's given His very Spirit—not just to be around you, but to be in you. This spirit comes to dwell within and strengthen us. And I can stand up straight in the face of the things that happen and say, God will give me strength because He's given me His Spirit.

What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of LIFE??

- The INSIGHT of WHY we suffer
- The KNOWLEDGE that God has a PLAN
- The UNDERSTANDING that God's love prevails
- The TRUTH that He has given us His Spirit
- The WISDOM that God is sovereign

Next, we have The WISDOM that God is sovereign.

Do you know the word sovereign means that there's no one above Him? There's no one or nothing that is above God. And that includes death, nothing, disease, sickness, poverty—none of those things stand above Him. He stands above them. And that gives you and I just an incredible insight that strengthens our lives. My God is sovereign. And boy, it leads me to pray. It is one of the greatest motivating factors of prayer: My God is sovereign above all.

This thing has come to attack my friends, or me, or my family, or whatever. And we can come at that thing with prayer because we have a greater power. We have a greater force with us through the very power of God because He is sovereign over all those things.

What does the Gospel offer for those who face the challenges of life??

- The INSIGHT of WHY we suffer
- The KNOWLEDGE that God has a PLAN
- The UNDERSTANDING that God's love prevails
- The TRUTH that He has given us His Spirit
- The WISDOM that God is sovereign
- The COMFORT that there is MORE to life

And then finally, we have The COMFORT that there's MORE to life than this life, frankly.

Now, this is something, as Americans, we've lost sight of. You read the Bible, you read the New Testament particularly, you will find out that they had a hope that went beyond this life. See, you and I think that if we lose the thing in this life, that we've lost it.

And we even talk about our loved ones and we say we lost them. Those words are so inappropriate, particularly when we're talking about believers. We're children. You lose anybody? God doesn't lose anybody. He knows exactly where they are.

And I understand—the idea is that we've lost the fellowship, we've lost the connection on a day-to-day basis with that person. But the fact of the matter is, they are very much alive. And the reality is, this life is not the end!

And again, you read in the New Testament and you will see that in the writings of the New Testament authors. And it wasn't like they considered this life nothing, but they looked toward the life that is to come with great expectancy, anticipation, and excitement.

Paul said, it is better by far to go and be with the Lord. (Philippians 1:23-24) Now, that's not something that fits into our American vocabulary. We wouldn't

say that. If somebody dies, we rarely ever say, well, you know what happened to him was better by far. You kidding? We're all about this life.

But when we really get into the Scriptures, and we let the Word of God really challenge us with what it says, we begin to understand that there is a great comfort in the Word of God related to this idea that our lives are bound up in Him, and there is so much more than what we have right here.

David asked the question, who but God is a solid rock? Who but God? (2 Samuel 22:32) Rhetorical question. There is none other. Jude even wrote his own doxology. You guys know who Jude was in the physical sense, I mean, he's the man who wrote the book of Jude right before the Book of Revelation, but he was also the earthly brother of Jesus—half-brother, if you will. He was a son of Mary and Joseph.

And at the very end of his very short letter, he wrote his own doxology. Here's what he said:

Jude 1:24 (ESV)

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling...

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling...

He is able.

Paul gives us insight into how He does that—all the things that we mentioned, fundamentally through His Word, knowing His Word.

People, don't settle for somebody else knowing the Word of God for you. Get into the Scriptures, know what they have to say, and allow your life to be strengthened by the knowledge of the Word of God.