

## **INTRODUCTION**

Well, if you're interested in some Christmas songs for those who are psychologically challenged, I came across a funny list the other day. For people who suffer from paranoia, here's their Christmas song: "Santa Claus is Coming to Get Me." For those who suffer from schizophrenia: "Do You Hear What I Hear?" For those who suffer from codependency: "On the First Day of Christmas, My True Love Gave to Me ... but then I gave it all back to him." For those who suffer from multiple personality disorder: "We Three Kings Disoriented Are." For those who suffer from obsessive-compulsive syndrome: "Deck the Halls and the walls and the porch and the yard and the car and the trees and the street and the office and the dog." You can perhaps relate to that.

Here we come to the end of the book of Romans. I invite you to turn to Romans 16:21. We finally come to the end of this wonderful study of this great book. You may think we took a long time to go through it, two years. Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was the pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, it took him 13 years to preach through Romans, and he preached over 500 sermons from that book. So you got off kind of easy. I want you to know that.

### **Romans Review**

As we look at this, I want to give a little brief review of the entire book of Romans, so you can kind of have an understanding of what the book is all about.

### **Chapters 1-8: the doctrinal section**

That was the teaching section. That's where we learned about the doctrine of total depravity, that we're all sinners lost without Jesus. We learned about God's judgment and wrath against sin. We also learned about God's solution and the way of salvation.

### **Chapters 9-11: the national section**

That's where Paul was writing about the nation of Israel, both past, present, and even future.

### **Chapters 12-15: the practical section**

I call it the practical section, because it was very practical about how to live the Christian life, how to love one another, how to submit to the government authorities; very practical section. Then here at

### **Chapter 16: the personal section**

Last week we were introduced to 27 of the Apostle Paul's friends, and this morning we're going to be introduced to 8 more of them. Before we get into the text, I want you to answer this question, but don't fill in the blank. Just think about the answer. Who wrote Romans? If you're thinking Paul wrote Romans, you're wrong at least for two reasons, and we're going to see that. Let's begin reading in verse 21 of Romans 16.

He says, Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, my relatives. Of course, we know who Timothy is. That was Paul’s spiritual protégé who later became the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Paul wrote him two letters about how to be a pastor. We don’t know anything about his three relatives there other than they’re with him. Verse 22, here’s who wrote Romans. I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

Paul did not take pen in hand and write the book of Romans. He instead dictated it, and Tertius was a slave who was a stenographer, who was a scribe, so he actually is the one who wrote it down. You could say Tertius wrote Romans. How do we know he was a slave? By his name; his name means third. You see, the Roman slaves had no names. They were known by numbers most of the time. The first slave was called Primus. Slave number two was called Secundus. Slave number three was called Tertius. Slave number four was called Quartus, and we’re going to meet Quartus over in verse 24. So these were slaves.

Keep reading in verse 23. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church enjoy, send you his greetings. No doubt the Apostle Paul stayed in the home of Gaius eating his meals there, and thank God for Gaius and other people who through the years have shown hospitality to God’s servants. Then he talks about Erastus who is the city’s director of public works. He was a man prominent in Corinth, and thank God then, as today, we have Christians who are in prominent public service. Then he ends there with another slave, Quartus, send you his greetings.

Now, some of your Bibles have the words next, “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” Some of you don’t. Some of you need to look back at the end of verse 20, and there you’ll find it printed there, “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” Some manuscripts have it there, some at the end of verse 24. We believe the Apostle Paul, whenever he finished dictating a letter, then he would take the pen in his own hand and he would write out a final personal greeting in his own handwriting. That was his way to authenticate the letter. We also know from one of the other epistles that Paul apparently had eye problems. This is why he said, I make the letters so large.

Then as Paul comes to the end, these last three verses, 25-27. He is going to tell us something about God. Now, I want you to consider the answer to this question one more time, who wrote Romans? Paul? No. Tertius? No. And I’m so proud, because in one of the early services, when the youth choir was still in the choir loft, I asked the question, “Who wrote Romans?” and one of these guys on the front row gave the right answer. When I said,

### **Who wrote Romans? GOD**

This kid sitting right here said, “God.” And that’s the answer. Because the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16, all scripture is God-breathed. So it was God who inspired Paul to say these words. It was God to inspired this writing. Folks, that’s something very critically important, if you’re going to believe and understand the Bible. Many times in the New Testament, it says “The Lord said,” and then there’s a quotation from Psalms. Was it David or the Lord? It was the Lord who wrote it. Many times you see a quotation from Isaiah, and it says, “The Lord said.” Was it the Lord or was it Isaiah? It was the Lord. When the Bible speaks, God is speaking. So I started to

call it the autobiography of God, because I want us to see what God reveals about himself beginning in verse 25.

“Now, to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him, to the only wise God—and then here’s the title of the message—to God be the glory, forever, through Jesus Christ, amen.”

Now, in Paul’s deepest letter that he ever wrote about God, he reserves these final important words. Often the last thing that is ever said or written about a person is that which is most often remembered. In fact, we have a practice as human beings that we often write our epitaphs or have someone write our epitaphs on a tombstone. That’s often what people remember about us. Through the years I’ve kind of collected some sort of humorous epitaphs. These are actual epitaphs. There’s a lady who’s buried in Ribbesford, England. Her name was Anna Wallace. This is what it says on her tombstone about her. The children of Israel wanted bread, and the Lord sent them manna. Old Clerk Wallace wanted a wife, but the devil sent him Anna.

Outside Ruidoso, New Mexico, there’s a tombstone that says this. “Here lies Johnny Yeast. Pardon me for not rising.”

Apparently a guy died in an automobile accident, so this is what’s on his tombstone. “Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake. He stepped on the gas instead of the brake.”

There’s a tombstone outside London, England, that says this. “Remember, young man, as you walk by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you soon shall be, so prepare, young man, to follow me.” That seems to be pretty profound. Somebody wrote on the tombstone, “To follow you is not my intent, until I know which way you went.”

## **I. GOD SAYS: “I AM THE POWERFUL GOD—I WILL GIVE YOU STABILITY”**

It’s interesting to read the final words that people write about somebody. For sure, God will never have an epitaph written. Why? Because God will never die. The truth is, God is revealing himself in his autobiography here, and we can learn three important things about God. Number one, first thing God says, I am the powerful God and I will give you stability. That’s what he’s saying to us today. I am the powerful God, and I will give you stability. Look, please, at verse 25. Now, unto him who is able. That word able actually is the Greek word “dunamis,” from which we get our word power. We get our English word dynamite from that Greek word “dunamis.” What it’s saying is God is a powerful God. He’s a dynamite God.

Keep reading, verse 25. “He is able to establish you.” Now, that word in Greek is “sterix” Have you ever heard of steroids? Our English word steroid comes from that word “establish.” It means to give you the maximum amount of strength available. God is saying, I am the source of emotional, and spiritual steroids and there are no side effects, and it’s perfectly legal. I want to give you strength and stability. Why do we need strength and stability? It’s because you and I

live in a world where everything is falling apart, everything is breaking up. And in a world where things are going wild, you and I need stability.

Look at what the Bible says there in Colossians 2:6-7. Paul goes a little deeper into how God does this. "So then just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him." Notice this. Rooted—that means you go down deep—built up—that means you go up high—and strengthened—that means you stand firm—in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Have you ever seen that photograph, of the Lone Pine Tree? Somewhere out in the Rocky Mountains there is a lone, gnarled pine tree that has been growing for over 100 years, and it's right on the ridge of one of those Rocky Mountains. It is so high that all year long, the winds buffet it. Most of the years, the temperature is below freezing, and there's very little other vegetation in that area except for this one gnarled, bent, lone pine tree. Its roots go down hundreds of feet through the cracks in the rocks until they can find some nourishing soil. Even though it's been battered by winds, it bends, but it has never been broken.

That lone pine tree stands as a parable, a symbol of the strength and stability that God wants to give each one of us. In fact, the Bible says in Psalms 1:3 that those who don't consider the way of sinners or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scornful, Psalms 1 says he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. What that means is, friend, when the howling winds of despair and doubt and affliction come your way, God says, I want you to be so deeply rooted in my word and I want you to be so built up in my strength that nothing can cause you to lose your stability.

As I'm looking out on a well-dressed Sunday morning crowd, I am aware that there are a lot of problems in this room that few of us know anything about. It was the great English preacher, Joseph Parker, who made this observation. He said, on every pew in every church on every Sunday, there's at least one person who is facing a major crisis. On every pew, in every church, on every Sunday, there's somebody on that pew facing at that moment a major crisis.

Friend, if you're not doing so at this moment, look down your pew, because there's somebody on your pew that is. It may be a marriage problem, it may be a financial problem, it may be a health problem, your own health or someone you love, their health problem. It may be some family problem, but there's some crisis that you're going through. This is what God's trying to say to you today. He's saying, "I'm powerful enough to give you the strength and stability to endure this problem." In fact, just look at those words again, verse 25. "God who is able." There are so many other forces and things that are unable to give you strength during these days, but God is able.

Now, of course, I finish Romans this morning. Then I'm going to start a little four-week series called, "Are you Ready for a New Millennium?" Next Sunday I'm going to talk about God's impeccable sense of timing. On December 26, I'm going to talk about the man who divided history. On New Year's Eve, right here at 10 p.m. to midnight, we're going to pray in the New Year, and I'm going to teach the whole book of Revelation. That's going to be part of that series. Then the first Sunday in January, I'll preach one final message from that series. Then, folks, during the beginning part of the year 2000, I'm going to preach through the book of Daniel. I'm

really excited about sharing the book of Daniel with you on Sunday mornings. One of our favorite stories from the book of Daniel is about those three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. You remember what happened to them? Because they refused to bow down and worship an idol, they were going to be thrown into a fiery furnace.

It's interesting to read what they said. Nebuchadnezzar said, "Okay, boys, I'll give you one more chance. All you have to do is bow down and worship this idol. If you'll do that, I'll prevent you from being thrown into the fiery furnace." This is what they said. "Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter. Our God is able." Hang on to that phrase. Our God is able. This is what they said. "Our God is able to deliver us from the fire." But that's not all they said. This is what they said next. Our God is able to deliver us from the fire, but even if he doesn't, O Nebuchadnezzar, we're still going to trust him and praise him. We're not going to deny him. We're not going to leave him. Our God is able to deliver us from the fire, but even if he doesn't, we're still going to praise him." Folks, that's real faith. Have you ever noticed how many times, if you've got a problem you say, "Okay, God, I'm going to ask you to deliver me. God, I believe you're able to deliver me, but if the answer doesn't come immediately," you say, "What's wrong, God? I prayed about this for a year. I prayed about this for two years." That's not real faith. Real faith says our God is able to deliver me, our God is able to provide, but even if he doesn't, you still love him, you still serve him.

There are some of you right now that the message God is trying to say to you this morning is this: I am able to deliver you, I'm able to give you strength and stability to endure whatever it is you're facing. This is what you need to walk out of here saying today, "My God is able." My God is able. Would you say that out loud with me right now? My God is able—one more time—My God is able. That's what he's trying to say to you.

## **II. GOD SAYS: "I AM THE ETERNAL GOD—I WILL REVEAL THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION TO YOU"**

Number two, the second thing God says about himself, he says, number two, I am the eternal God, and I will reveal the mystery of salvation to you. I am the eternal God, and I will reveal the mystery of salvation to you. Now, as I was saying, next Sunday I'm going to talk about God's impeccable sense of timing. God is a God of eternity, and you and I are creatures of time. God is not limited by time. And what happens to you when you become a Christian, watch this, God takes you from time and places you in eternity. We'll see a lot more about that next Sunday morning, but for now you just need to understand that God is eternal. Look at verse 26. It says the eternal God is the one who revealed this mystery.

When I say the word mystery, what do you think about? Do you think about an Alfred Hitchcock movie, an Agatha Christie novel, a Sherlock Holmes novel in which there is some twisted plot in which if you're shrewd enough and sharp enough you can figure out the mystery? Is that what you think of the word "mystery?" That is not how the word mystery is used in the Bible. It is actually the word "musterion." That's where we get our English word mystery. It doesn't mean some twisted plot that is so convoluted that you have to be a member of Menses to figure it out. In the Bible, the word mystery means something that had formerly been hidden, but now it is

revealed to everybody. Now, God has said, it is no longer a mystery, I'll make it so plain, it's as clear as the nose upon your face.

Now, look at Colossians 1:26-27. Here is another place where this so-called mystery is completely explained. "This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it's out in the open. God wants everyone, not just Jews, to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out. Regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing, the mystery in a nutshell is just this. Here it is: Christ is in you." Could it be any simpler than that? "Christ is in you; therefore, you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple."

Now, there are two parts to this mystery. Let's look at it. Number one, the first part of the mystery is this.

### **a. God offers forgiveness to both Jews and Gentiles**

Now, that was a mystery, because for 1,400 years it was hidden from the Jewish people. When God called Abraham and said, Abraham, I'm going to be your God. I'm not only going to be your God, I'm going to be the God of your children, and there's going to be a great nation that's going to come from you, and I'm going to be the God of the nation of Israel. Abraham said, "That's great." But then God said this. And Abraham, through you shall all nations of the earth be blessed. And somehow over 1,400 years, the Jewish people forgot that second part of the covenant, that all nations would be blessed. And you know what happened? Just read your Old Testament. The Jews became so selfish with their God Jehovah that they thought he was only the God of the Jews. If you weren't a Jew, you couldn't relate to this God.

And then Jesus comes along and then later the Apostle Paul comes along and says, oh, no, that's wrong. He's not just the God of the Jews, he's the God of anyone who will seek him and anyone who will come to him in faith. He can be their God. So that was the first part of the mystery, Jews and Gentiles. Here's the second part, and this is what it means to us today. He's saying

### **b. Salvation is internal life. Internal life, not external conduct**

Would you look up again at that text from Colossians 1, the bold letters, Christ is in you?

It's amazing for me today to see that there are still so many Christians who think that the Christian life is being good and doing good. You have to live the Christian life, you have to try hard every day to live the Christian life. That's what they think it is. The Bible says the Christian life is not you trying to be good, it is literally Christ living inside of you and his life being expressed through your life. That is the mystery. That's the glorious secret of the Christian life. And that's why there are so many people that they're plugged into what I call the Christian religion, and they don't know anything about the internal life of God's son, Jesus Christ. You can be in the Christian religion, but if Christ is not living inside of you, you've never been saved, you've never been born again. That's what salvation is.

Let me explain it by telling a story. One of my favorite stories was told by a preacher who pastored in Boston for many years at the beginning of this century. His name was Dr. S. D.

Gordon. In 1939, the New York City World’s Fair was being held, and Dr. Gordon was attending the New York City World’s Fair, and he’s walking across the pavilion, and he says he looked across this wide paved pavilion and on the other side he saw an amazing sight. There was an oriental man. He assumed he was oriental, because he had a gaudily colored kimono on and had one of those oriental coolie hats. And that man was standing there at a hand water pump and he was pumping. And Dr. Gordon said this man was pumping that handle at a furious rate, and the water was gushing forth from that hand pump. Dr. Gordon said he watched for a moment, and then he watched for a moment longer and said, “That man is strong. I can’t believe he has the strength and stamina to keep pumping that water, but surely, he’s going to tire in just a moment.” But he said as he watched, he didn’t slow down. He didn’t stop. He just kept pumping. Dr. Gordon said, “That man has got to be the strongest man I’ve ever seen.” He decided to investigate. He walked over there. As he got closer, he discovered that this man was not a man at all. It was a wooden dummy dressed up to look like a man. And his wooden arm was hinged at the elbow, and his wooden hand was attached to this pump. But then he discovered it was not a pump at all. Instead it was just an outlet, and behind the display, there was a water tower, and by the force of gravity the water was flowing out through there. Suddenly he realized it was not a picture of a man pumping the water, it was a picture of the water pumping the man.

Now, listen for just a moment. Because, friend, if you’ll understand the difference between the two of those, that’s one of the greatest distinctions you’ll ever discover about the Christian life. The Christian life is not you or me trying to pump it, make it happen. It is the life of Jesus flowing through us. You see, we don’t pump the Christian life. It’s the Christian life that pumps us. We don’t pump Jesus. He pumps us. In John 7:38, he said “He that he who believes in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.”

Now, watch this. I know so many Christians who are pumping away. They find somebody that’s unlovely and they say, “I’m going to love that person if it kills me.” Then they just kind of give up. Christ in you loves that person, and so you let Christ love that person through you. Somebody did you dirty, and you’re supposed to forgive them, and you say, “I’m going to try to forgive that person,” and you just can’t. Do you believe Jesus Christ can forgive anyone? Certainly. You let that forgiveness flow through you. That is the secret, that is the mystery of the Christian life, and God is revealing it to us.

### **III. GOD SAYS: “I AM THE ONLY WISE GOD—I WILL HELP YOU IF YOU WILL SEEK ME”**

Here’s the third thing God says. Number one, God says, I am the powerful God, I’ll give you stability. Number two, he says, I am the eternal God, I’ll reveal the mystery of salvation to you. Number three, God says, I am the only wise God. The only wise God. I will help you if you will seek me. Would you look, please, down there at verse 27? To the only wise God. Now, why doesn’t it say the only God? You say, isn’t there only one God? Please listen to me. There’s only one true God. There’s only one living God. There’s only one wise God. But would you agree with me that throughout the centuries, men and women have created multitudes of gods, small G. A god for this, a god for that, here a god, there a god, everywhere a god, god.

In fact, in the Old Testament, they had all these idols. God was saying, for those of you that are worshipping idols, those idols are dead. Look at Psalms 135. God is contrasting himself with these idols. He says the idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. As I said before, folks, the most profound question you can ever answer is this. Did God make man or did man make God? These idols are gods made by man, which are no gods. Keep reading. “They have mouths, but they cannot speak. They have eyes, but they cannot see.” What God is saying, I can speak, I can see. “They have ears, these idols do, but they cannot hear. Nor is there breath—the word “breath” means spirit. There’s no breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them and so will all who trust in them.”

When Paul wrote this letter to the church at Rome, he wrote it to a very religious culture? I mean, how many of you in this room have studied history, and know about the Greek and the Roman Pantheon, the Greek gods, Zeus, Apollo, Mercury, Aphrodite and on and on it can go. They had lots of gods. In fact, in the city of Rome was the Pantheon. Pantheon means “all gods.” You could go down to one building, it’s kind of like one-stop shopping, “gods are us,” because there was an idol for every single little god in this Pantheon. They had a little alcove, a little niche, and in each one of these little alcoves there was an icon or a representative of that god. Seriously, one-stop worship. You need some rain, you go talk to that god. You need fertility, talk to this god. You need something else, talk to that god. When Jesus Christ and Christianity came to Rome, the Romans said, “Hey, we’ve got room for another god. We’ll put Jesus up next to Apollos or Mercury.” The Christians said, “No way! Jesus is not one of many gods. He is the only wise God.”

They persecuted and killed Christians in Rome in the first century, accused them of being atheists, because they didn’t accept all these gods. You say, “Well, pastor, thanks for that little history lesson there, but after all, we’re on the verge of the 21st century. We have no idols today.” Oh, yes, we do. Have you noticed in the last few weeks, we had all of these greatest of the century lists? The greatest movies of the century, greatest actors of the century, greatest athletes of the century. If you were to ask me who were the greatest prophets of the 20th century, the three names that would come to my mind are C. S. Lewis, A. W. Tozer, and Leonard Ravenhill. Prophets. I’m not talking about pastors or preachers, but prophets. That means you ought to read anything you can get your hands on by those three guys. Let me read to you what A. W. Tozer said in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy* and about the rampant idolatry that exists today in America.

“When we try to imagine what God is like, we must, of necessity, use that which is not God as the raw material for our minds to work on. Hence, whatever we visualize God to be, he is not. If we insist upon trying to imagine him, we end up with an idol. An idol not made with hands, but with our own thoughts. And an idol of the mind is as offensive to God as an idol of the hand.”

That’s pretty deep stuff, because he’s saying God is bigger than my brain or your brain. God is bigger than any person’s ability to even imagine God, and if you think you have condensed God down to some little thought in your mind and you’ve got him figured out where he’s convenient to you and for you, you’ve committed idolatry. God is saying, “I am the only wise God, and don’t limit who I am and what I can do.”

Well, that's what God's trying to say to us today. Would you look at the last four words of Romans? This is how he does it "through Jesus Christ, amen." That's the channel. That's the key. That's the way, through Jesus Christ, amen.

Outside of Glasgow, Scotland, there's a seafood restaurant. It has an interesting story behind it. Years ago there was some Scottish fishermen in there bragging about their catch. As fishermen always have done, one of them was talking about how big was the fish he caught, and as he thrust his arms out, he inadvertently struck a pot of hot tea that broke on the wall and left a blot, a stain on that white wall. Well, they tried to clean it off and he apologized, but it still left a stain there. While they were talking about it with the owner, a stranger in that restaurant walked over there and looked at that stain. And then he withdrew from his pocket a drawing pencil and began to sketch around the stain until he had drawn a beautiful picture of a majestic stag with its antlers down. Then he pulled a couple of other colored pencils out of his pocket and began to sketch in a background to that. And as the crowd in that restaurant stood dumbfounded, they watched a beautiful wildlife landscape appear on that wall. They discovered that the visitor, the stranger, was none other than Sir Edwin Landseer, the most renowned wildlife artist in all of Great Britain. Today in that restaurant, the most prized possession is that mural on the wall of that wildlife scene. What started out as an ugly stain was transformed into a beautiful scene.

Isn't that what Jesus does to us? Isn't that what Jesus does for us? He takes that ugly blot and that blemish and that stain of sin in our lives, and he doesn't just wash it away and leave nothing. Instead he takes it and he transforms our lives into something beautiful. That's what the book of Romans has been all about. Yes, we are sinners, but by the power of God, he can transform us. I love that song the Gaithers made popular years ago that goes like this. "Something beautiful, something good, all my confusions he understood. All I had to offer him was selfishness and strife, but he made something beautiful of my life."

## OUTLINE

Romans Review:

Chapters 1-8 Doctrinal

Chapters 9-11 National

Chapters 12-15 Practical

Chapter 16 Personal

\* Who wrote Romans? God \*

God says: "I AM:

I. THE POWERFUL GOD—I WILL GIVE YOU STABILITY"

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. *Colossians 2:6-7*

God says: "I AM:

II. THE ETERNAL GOD—I WILL REVEAL THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION TO YOU

This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it's out in the open. God wants everyone, not just Jews, to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you, therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple. *Colossians 1:26-27 The Message*

- a. God offers forgiveness to Jews and Gentiles!
- b. Salvation is internal life, not external conduct!

God says: "I AM:

III. THE ONLY WISE GOD—I WILL HELP YOU ... IF YOU SEEK ME."

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. *Psalms 135:15-18*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes