

ALTARED STATE

"IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS"

ROMANS 16:25-27

Describing contemporary Americans, someone has said, "They work at their play, worship their work, and play at their worship." By this he did not mean that we enjoy our worship or that it refreshes and revitalizes us. Instead he meant that we don't take it very seriously, even though it is an essential spiritual discipline.

When we worship, we exalt, honor, adore, and glorify God in response to his holiness and his grace in the world. In our thoughts and in the words, rituals, and symbols that we employ in worship, we ascribe to God the infinite worth that belongs to him alone. Either alone or in unison with other believers, we experience God's presence and deepen our relationship with him through sincere worship and are thereby inspired to live righteous lives. In this way worship truly is a transforming experience.

Dallas Willard writes, "If in worship we are met by God himself, our thoughts and words turn to perception and experience of God, who is then really present to us in some degree of his greatness, beauty, and goodness. This will make for an immediate, dramatic change in our lives" (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 178).

Elsewhere he maintains that worship apart from study and study apart from worship are both dangerous. The two belong together. "We must not worship without study, for ignorant worship is of limited value and can be very dangerous. We may

***To the only wise God be glory
forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.***

– Romans 16:27

develop 'a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge' (Rom. 10:2) and do great harm to ourselves and others. But worship must be added to study to complete the renewal of our mind through a willing absorption in the radiant person who is worthy of all praise. Study without worship is also dangerous, and the people of Jesus constantly suffer from its effects, especially in academic settings" (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 362-63).

This Week's Core Competency

Worship – I worship God for who he is and what he has done for me.

To borrow from the prophet Isaiah, worship involves seeing the Lord "high and exalted, seated on a throne" (Isa 6:1), something that inevitably triggers deep thinking and profound feeling. True worship simultaneously engages the mind and touches the heart. John Ortberg observes:

"Some churches specialize in generating emotion. The platform people are expert at moving worshipers to laughter or tears. Attendees gradually learn to evaluate the service in terms of the emotion they feel.

In time, however, the law of diminishing returns sets in. Prayers are offered in highly emotive style and bathed in background music. Stories have to get more dramatic, songs more sentimental, preaching more histrionic, to keep people having intense emotional experiences.

Such worship is often shallow, sometimes artificial, and rarely reflective. Little attention is given to worshiping with the mind. It produces people who have little depth or rootedness. They may develop a 'zeal for God, but not according to

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knowledge' (Rom. 10:2). They become worship junkies, searching for whichever church can supply the best rush.

This is *Scarecrow worship*: it would be better if it only had a brain.

On the other hand, some churches focus keenly on cognitive correctness. They recite great creeds, distribute reams of exegetical information, craft careful prayers ahead of time. And yet the heart and spirit are not seized with the wonder and passion that characterize those in Scripture who must fall on their faces when they encounter the living God. No one is ever so moved that she actually moves.

This is tragic because, as Dallas Willard writes, 'to handle the things of God without worship is always to falsify them.'

Those who attend such services may be competent to spot theological error, but the unspoken truth is they're also a little bored. Their worship is dry—it does not connect with their deepest hurts and desires. Rarely does it generate awe or healing, and never raucous joy.

This is *Tin Man worship*: if it only had a heart"

("Can You Engage Both Heart and Mind?," www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1999/spring/912032.html).

Paul engages both our heads and hearts in his concluding doxology found in Romans 16:25-27. He engages our heads first, when he refers to the gospel about Jesus Christ as "the revelation of the mystery" (v. 25). In the gospel the infinite wisdom and genius of God is revealed. God declares "not guilty" sinners who are "not innocent" through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Ro 3:24), uses the unbelief of Israel as an opportunity to take salvation to the Gentile nations (11:11)—something for which I as a Gentile am very grateful because I was once "separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and a foreigner to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus I have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:12-13)—and that with a view to making his people envious, so that in the end "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). Paul then engages our hearts with these words of worship, "to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen" (16:27).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 16:25-27

25 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed

and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "establish" in v. 25.
- * Bracket "in accordance with" in v. 25.
- * Circle "my" in v. 25.
- * Bracket "revelation of the mystery" in v. 25.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 26.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose/result* in v. 26.
- * Bracket "obedience that comes from faith" in v. 26.
- * Box "through" indicating *means* in v. 27.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Put what "establish you" means in your own words.
2. Describe the relationship of the gospel to "establish you" ("to establish you *in accordance with my gospel*").
3. Paul refers to the gospel he preached as "my" gospel. In what sense was it his?
4. How can Paul use "mystery" to refer to the clear message about Jesus Christ he preached?
5. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 26.
6. God's mystery from eternity past has now been revealed. For what *purpose*?
7. Describe the relationship of "obedience" to "faith" in verse 26.
8. Verse 27 contains a doxology. Explain the difference between a *doxology* and a *benediction*.
9. **Discussion:** Like Paul, you no doubt think God is "wise." Talk about what makes you think so.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Doxologies, short poems of praise/worship to God, are frequently found in Paul's epistles. The one found in Romans 16:25-27 is an example of a longer one. Many are quite brief. For example: "the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen" (Ro 1:25); "the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (9:5); and "To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Php 4:20). Some are quite long. For example: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph 3:20-21); "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen" (1Ti 6:15-16); and finally, perhaps the longest:

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"

For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Ro 11:33-36).

About the closing doxology in Paul's letter to the Romans, one author writes: "Paul ends his majestic letter to the Romans with a doxology in praise of the God who has in the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed the climax of salvation history . . . Prominent here again is the theme of the revelation of the gospel as the pinnacle of salvation history and as a message of universal applicability. Paul ends as he began. Paul clearly intends to stimulate the Roman Christians' praise of God by reminding them of what he has told them of God's wonderful plan for their salvation in Jesus Christ" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 938).

These three verses form a single sentence that opens in verse 25 with an oblique reference to "him who is able to establish you," whom verse 27 identifies as "the only wise God." "To establish" means to "strengthen" or to "make stand firm" in the faith. This is accomplished "in accordance with" or in congruence with the scope of the gospel and likely by means of the gospel as well. Paul seems to be using "gospel" in a broader sense than he does in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 where in a narrower sense it refers to Christ's death according to the Scriptures, his burial and resurrection on the third day, followed by his appearances to many believers. Here he uses gospel in a broader sense where it refers to "the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" and in which "the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Ro 1:16-17). Here "gospel" encompasses all he has to say in his letter about the subject, including his defense of justification and sanctification by faith for Jews and Gentiles alike (chs. 1-8), as well as the future salvation of national Israel (chs. 9-11). All this is in keeping with the mystery—namely, the salvation of Jews and Gentiles by grace rather than works and their union together in the one body of Christ—hidden from eternity past but now revealed by the prophets for this purpose: that "all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith" (v. 26). In a nutshell, God declares "not guilty" Jews and Gentiles alike, who are "not innocent," through the redemption provided by Jesus Christ. He uses the rejection of Israel as an occasion for saving Gentiles; once their full number is saved, all Israel in turn will be saved. The wisdom of God seen in the genius of his plan to provide salvation to all moves Paul to worship: "to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

The wisdom of God seen in the genius of his plan to save Jews and Gentiles alike by faith and unite them in one body, a plan kept hidden from the beginning of time, stirs us to praise and worship him.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Describe your personal thoughts on the genius of God's plan to provide salvation to everyone by faith.

List what moves you to praise and worship God.

Identify how you might intentionally incorporate at least one of these things into the regimen of your life.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 25 **establish** Cf., "Now to him who is able to strengthen you" (NET, ESV); "Let us give glory to God! He is able to make you stand firm in your faith" (GNT). "In the introduction (1:11) Paul wrote that he was looking forward to his ministry at Rome as a means of strengthening the congregation. Now he acknowledges that in the ultimate sense only God can bring this result (*sterizo* the Greek word for 'strengthen,' tr. 'establish' in NIV, is the same in both places). As an instrument for establishing the saints, nothing can compare with the gospel" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 10:170). "Paul's point is that the gospel is the source of the strengthening" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 938).

v. 25 **in accordance with** Or "according to" (ESV, NET, NRSV); cf., "in keeping with the good news" (NIRV); "just as my good news says" (NLT).

v. 25 **my** Not that it originated with Paul, but that it was revealed directly to him. "Not a gospel different from that preached by others, but a gospel Paul received by direct revelation (see Gal 1:12 and note on 1:11)" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Ro 16:25). "Doubtless the possessive pronoun points up the fact that in Paul's case it came by direct revelation (1:1; cf. Gal 1:12), though confirmed as to its actual historical content by leaders of the Jerusalem church (1 Cor 15:1-11)" (Harrison, 170).

v. 25 **mystery** "The so-called mystery religions of Paul's day used the Greek word (*mysterion*) in the sense of something that was to be revealed only to the initiated. Paul, himself, however, used it to refer to something formerly hidden or obscure but now revealed by God for all to know and understand" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Ro 11:25). "The 'mystery' of the gospel had been hidden in eternity past until God revealed it, first in the Old Testament, partially, and then fully in the New (cf. 11:25; Gal. 1:12, 15-16; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26; 4:3)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 219, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf). "We may compare here 1 Cor. 2.6-10 in regard to the revelation of the salvific mystery. Paul may be specifically alluding to God's salvation plan to include both Jew and Gentile in Christ on the basis of grace, faith, and the pure mercy of God, which he makes especially clear in Romans 9-11. This 'mystery' was sealed from eternity but is now revealed in time through the writings of the prophets" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 401).

v. 26 **obedience** Lit., "obedience of faith" (ESV, NET, NRSV); cf., "obedience that springs from faith" (ISV); "to obey him by trusting in him" (NIRV). "Scholars debate the exact relationship of these two words. Many think that Paul intends to present faith as the basis for, or motivating force of, obedience: 'obedience that springs from faith.' This rendering places the emphasis on postconversion commitment: the obedience of the Christian that is to follow and be the fruit of faith. The other major option is to take 'faith' as a definition of 'obedience': 'the obedience which is faith.' In support of this last interpretation can be mentioned the numerous places where obedience and faith occur in parallel statements, as well as those instances where Paul speaks of 'obeying the gospel'" (Moo, 51-52). A survey of English translations suggests that "obedience that springs from faith" is the more likely sense (contra. Moo, 52).

v. 27 **through** "So the God whose eternal purpose has been described as hidden and then manifested in the gospel of his Son, draws to himself through his Son the praise that will engross the saints through the ages to come. The silence that for so long held the divine mystery has given way to vocal and unending praise" (Harrison, 171).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Early in our marriage my husband and I established a firm boundary to protect family dinner time. Some of our best conversations and memories have been around that beat-up table. We've carried this priority into the kids' teen years, although it's become increasingly more difficult. These days getting the six of us in the same room for longer than 15 minutes, much less family dinner, involves a Christmas miracle. A few weeks ago, our family had the pleasure of taking a quick trip down to Houston for a Hillsong concert and sermon. What an amazing experience! The road trip was a blast and the deep, joyful, emotional worship we experienced as a family filled me up, while at the same time left me craving more. As we look at this week's Romans passage, I imagine Paul in full worship. Can't you picture him praying this blessing over believers in Rome—hands lifted, eyes closed, tears streaming down his cheeks as he honors and praises our Heavenly Father. This Christmas season, my heart desires more of this kind of worship. I want to step away from the rat race and commercialism and just worship. I want to grab and protect every family moment, from baking cookies to serving at Mission Arlington, and celebrate through worship. How will your family live out worship as Christmas approaches? Parents, I'm praying your family has protected moments of celebration and beautiful opportunities to worship our Risen Savior this holiday season.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ro 16:25-27

1. Who is the One to establish (strengthen, make stable) you?
2. How are we established?
3. To whom did God want his plan of salvation known?

What Do You Think

Why does Paul end his letter in worship—glorifying God and his plan of salvation for all people?

What R U Going To Do

Christmas season is a time to celebrate and worship God. Sit down with the family and creatively come up with one idea for each day in December to actively worship God.

Core Comp

Worship - I celebrate God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Memory Verse

Romans 12:9-12 Review

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.