

Romans 16:25-27**“God’s surprising command”**

From *The Living Bible* translation

“I commit you to God, Who is able to make you strong and steady in the Lord, just as the Gospel says, and just as I have told you.

This is God's plan of salvation for you Gentiles, kept secret from the beginning of time.

But now as the prophets foretold and as God commands, this message is being preached everywhere, so that people all around the world will have faith in Christ and obey Him.

To God, Who alone is wise, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

These are Paul’s closing words to the church in Rome (about 57, 58 AD).

Three quick points about this text.

- **Rome didn’t boast a huge cathedral then as it does now.**

No church building existed of any kind.

God’s people met in private homes or rented halls.

No single bishop-elder supervised any church.

Groups of elders-presbyters-pastors oversaw each congregation and shepherded the members.

These Scriptures make that clear:

Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17-35; Philippians 1:1;

1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:5-9.

The first part of Romans 16 makes it evident that tight-knit groups met in house churches in various parts of Rome.

The Church was the people; never a building.

Paul closed the letter to Rome with a benediction. Jewish people in Paul’s day were big on benedictions.

In fact the rabbis argued about how many benedictions were appropriate at a service.

Later, some rabbis thought that there should be 18 benedictions—one for each time the word *Jehovah* is used in the 29th *Psalms*.

Why they chose *Psalms 29*, I don’t know, except that the Lord’s name appears repeatedly (18 times) there.



Jesus disapproved of repetitive prayers.

He also deplored lengthy prayers:

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words” (Matthew 6:7 NIV).

We like for folks to be brief and to the point.

Evidently the Lord prefers that, too.

After all, he knows what we’re going to do before we think about doing it.

- **Paul and the other Apostles always focused on Jesus’ Good News:**

“But now as the prophets foretold and as God commands, this message is being preached everywhere, so that people all around the world will have faith in Christ and obey Him.”

Church people now seem to forget this fact:

“God commands, this message . . . (be) preached everywhere.”

- **If Jesus is God’s only Son, and if he alone holds the keys of death, only he can qualify us to be with God in the afterlife.**

Every person alive needs to know this truth.

There’s only one way off of this planet.

When Norma and I visited Israel in 1980, we toured with about 40 persons. Of that group there were only two Christian couples; a family from Texas, and Norma and I. All others were Jewish.

The Jewish tour leader kept insisting that we go to a night club in Jerusalem called the “Jerusalem of Gold.” We protested that night clubs weren’t our style.

The leader convinced us that though the place was called a night club, it was really a family type variety show with music and comedians--tamer than what was shown on American television in the eighties.

A Jewish couple from New Jersey also decided to attend. What we experienced at the night club shocked us—and I don’t refer to the revelry.

The building resembled a small gym with a second story balcony. Actors performed on a small stage. People jammed the floor around the small stand. A narrow staircase led to the balcony. They led us up the staircase and seated us at the far end from the staircase. In case of fire, that meant that we would be the last persons out, if we ever got out.

Two dangers concerned us.

First, they kept bringing people and seating them on the stairs. Patrons crammed the steps.

Second, there was no exit other than the way we came into the building. We saw potential disaster.

The LA fire department often

inspected the Hollywood church building and made us safety conscious. There had to be more than one exit and it had to be clearly marked. Aisles had to be clear. All doors had to swing out and be equipped with panic hardware. No door could be locked in such a way that it impeded quick exit.

Something else worried me.



If Norma and I were to die in a fire there, what would be said about us back in LA?

Community Bible study friends and church people contributed money for our trip.

What would they think if we died in a Jerusalem nightclub fire?

The Jewish couple from New Jersey and we developed an exit strategy.

There was a large picture-type window behind us.

One of us men would throw a chair through the window and jump to the ground below. The other man would assist his wife and Norma to the ground, and try to help others if possible.

We didn’t know what our chances were, but we felt we had reasonable likelihood.

Yet the odds of leaving this planet alive are zilch. There is no way off earth alive.

It’s statistically and historically proven.

Thousands die every day.

The evidence is indisputable.

It takes some of a full lifetime to learn this.

Most don’t want to face the fact.

God visited the planet in the form of Jesus to show us the way we can escape death and misery.

“I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father, except through me,” John 14:6 NIV.

If that’s true—that we can escape death’s hold by following Jesus, people should know about it.

Everyone needs to be informed of it.

“But now as the prophets foretold and as God commands, this message is being preached everywhere . . .”

Think how much time churches spend on window dressing, instead of telling this Great News.

Churches spend endless hours applying “makeup”—working on cosmetics.

I once received a 16 page packet of materials from a major denomination’s headquarters.

Can you guess the contents of those pages?

About half had to do with the location of various denominational meetings.

The other half contained information about how to have a fundraising pancake breakfast:

How to motivate the church members;

How to organize it;

How to advertise it;

Sample advertising flyers, etc., etc.



How many hours does the average church spend trying to raise a few hundred dollars from the community?

People live in misery and die without knowing the Good News that Jesus defeated death.

Meanwhile, churches pay high-salaried leaders to send information on how to conduct pancake breakfasts, etc., etc.

"But now as the prophets foretold and as God commands, this message is being preached everywhere . . ."

"People all around the world" need to come to "faith in Christ and obey him" (Christ).

The world says "It's not politically correct to say that Christ is the only way. There are many ways to heaven."

Jesus, the only Son of God, said:

"I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the father, except through me."

If a large apartment building is burning and you go through the halls warning occupants, will you worry about political correctness in telling people to escape?

As you go door to door, imagine that the first people you meet are Asian.

Will you say, "I need to find a black person and some Hispanics and some whites before I warn another Asian"?

Hardly, you get to as many doors as



possible and urge them to warn as many people as they can.

The "apartment" is in flames.

It's urgent that God's churches tell His message.

"But now as the prophets foretold and as God commands, this message is being preached everywhere, so that people all around the world will have faith in Christ and obey Him.

To God, Who alone is wise, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Leslie Weatherhead, the great British preacher, told of a postal clerk in his country who handled the mail to Santa Claus. The clerk was called the "Nixie Clerk" because he handled all the mail that was "nixied" because of an insufficient, inaccurate, or illegible address. Here is a letter sent to Weatherhead by the "Nixie Clerk." It read:

"Last Christmas the letters began to pile in, as usual, addressed to Santa Claus. I suppose I get hundreds of letters every year.

"On Christmas Eve I was working late, and was very sad and lonely in my corner. There was a great rush at the windows and the office, and the mails were loaded with Christmas gifts and greetings. A merry crowd rushed through the corridors and laughter sounded all around, but a great shadow of sorrow

rested over me and my eyes burned as I bent over my work. Finally the messenger brought me the last few 'Nixies' of the day and laid them on my desk. I took up the first one mechanically.

"Attached to it was a note from Postman Number 34: 'This was given me by a little girl at 302 Walnut Street,' said the note.

"My body tingled when I read it, because that address was my own home! The envelope was a small one addressed to 'Santa Claus, North Pole.'

I recognized my own little girl's cramped writing . . . This is what she wrote:

"Dear Santa Claus,

"We are very sad at home this year, and I don't want you to bring me anything. Little Charlie, my brother, went up to heaven last week, and all I want you to do when you come to my house is to take his toys to him. I will leave them in the corner by the chimney, his hobbyhorse and train and everything. He will be lost up in heaven without them, especially his horse. He always enjoyed riding it so much. So you just take them to him, and you needn't mind leaving me anything.

"If you could give Daddy something that would make him stop crying all the time, it would be the best thing you could do for me. I heard him tell

mummy that only eternity could cure him. Could you give him some of that? Be sure to take the things to Charlie and I will be your good little girl."

Only the Good News of Jesus can give anyone eternity.

Only "he is the way, and the truth, and the life."

May God work in all of us to tell others that Jesus defeated evil and that he overpowered death for all who believe in Him.

No message is more important than this.

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