



Central
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Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

How Do You Define Valuable?

Romans 16:17–27

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series: Romans: Unashamed • Undeserved • Unstoppable

I want to ask you, How do you define valuable? I have heard sad stories of people who had collections of things that didn't seem valuable at the time, but over time they became valuable. What seemed like a silly hobby became valuable collectors' items. We have all heard stories of a wife or mother tossing out a baseball card collection while cleaning out their attic. I read where one guy's girlfriend donated his 1952 Mickey Mantle rookie card to a garage sale. Just a quick search would tell you that Mickey Mantle's rookie card was worth over \$50,000 if it was in decent shape. So then I got curious and looked up the most expensive baseball card of all time. It was Honus Wagner's 1909 rookie card. In perfect condition it fetches \$500,000. Amazing!

Twenty-three years ago my friend told me to take these baseball cards and put them in my security box and one day this set will be worth a ton of money. So I thought, awesome, this will help out with my daughters' college or our retirement. The original cellophane is still on it. It's in great shape. So yesterday I did a search to see how much my investment in these valuable cards has appreciated in the last 23 years. I had some butterflies, thinking these cards are about to change my life. I started searching and I found the same box for sale on Amazon Prime, a 1993 Upper Deck NBA MVP Hologram Set in perfect condition. I looked at the sale price. Here it comes—college tuition, that trip to Italy, our next daughter's wedding, I already had it spent. I clicked on the price; it read \$19.99. The box of cards I had been protecting for 23 years was selling for \$19.99. These cards in my hand are worth 19 dollars and 99 cents. No college tuition, no trip to Italy; these cards in my hand will just about pay for me to take one of you to IHOP for lunch after church if we order off the senior menu and you pick up the tip!

It didn't cost us much to study Romans. In fact, all our messages from Romans can be watched online for free. But when we reflect on what we have learned, we can make the case that we have learned something that is worth more than a 1952 Mickey Mantle rookie card. I think Paul makes a great case that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is the most valuable thing we could ever possess because the gospel has the power to change a life. I trust that through our study each of us has been changed in some way. Hopefully each of us can see some evidence of spiritual growth in our life.

Maybe because of Romans you now have a sense that it's been your refreshed and stronger faith that has held you up in the difficult challenges you are facing.

Maybe because of this letter you have a new understanding of the depth of your own sin and the helpless state of your own depravity. And now you realize your desperate need for redemption has caused you to appreciate God's amazing grace so much more.

Maybe through this study God has shown you his power and presence and Jesus Christ has become more real and more personal to you and you are trusting him at new and deeper levels with the core issues of your life and you are grateful that the things of this world that worried you have become more and more dim and toothless.

Maybe because of key passages in Romans you are experiencing joy like never before. It's like you have a new set of spiritual lenses and when you look through them you feel more thankful, more content, and more at peace. As you peer through those lenses he gently reminds you that he is in all and over all you are going through. That if God can take care of eternity he can take care of the moment I'm in.

Maybe because of Romans you have fallen in love with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and you just can't keep it inside. This good news is bubbling out of you in new and exciting ways as you are more compelled to show grace and truth to others as God has shown you his grace and truth.

Maybe you have experienced a new freedom because from your reading Romans you realize that God isn't about religion or keeping a checklist of rules. He is about a relationship with you. And because of his relationship with you, he doesn't condemn you. He forgives you, redeems you, and empowers you by placing his Spirit to live inside you. God actually has taken up residence in you, as a constant presence, friend, teacher, and counselor.

And maybe you sit here today in a new state of freedom because you now know that God loves you without conditions. He sees all of you. He sees parts no one else can see. He sees parts that you don't want anyone else to see and he loves you anyway. The freedom we crave becomes a reality when we just sit in a quiet restful relationship with him. That the deepest and strongest bonds of relationship come when we hold tight to Christ every day and truly believe that reading and meditating on his Word breathes life into us every day.

This is the gospel. This is the good news. When we began Romans, the first thing Paul said to us was this: *“Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God”* (Rom. 1:1). What did Paul see as valuable? He saw the gospel, or literally the good news, as so valuable that he devoted his life to share it with others. So what does Paul choose to talk about in the very last chapter of arguably the greatest letter ever written? He chooses to remind us of the value of the gospel and for us to treat it properly.

The Gospel is So Valuable We Must Protect It

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil (Rom. 16:17-19).

Paul is urging the church to examine itself for certain behaviors. He is saying in his final words to us, watch out. Watch like through a scope of some kind. Step back like a telescope, or look into detail like a microscope. What is Paul warning them to watch out for? They are to watch out for dividers. Watch out for those who come into a church and attempt to break the church into factions. These folks can be knowledgeable, likable, hard workers, even appear to really care about the health of the church, but they have the dangerous and dark ability to split people into factions. They seem to love the drama. They stoke it. And when we examine the drama, their names continue to surface, returning again and again like a bad penny. They love whispered private conversations that focus on criticism. They have no interest in aligning themselves to serve. Dividers are interested in using others to gain personal power and influence.

So first Paul warns of dividers and then he warns of those who put up obstacles. The original meaning has the same root as our English word scandal. Not as we might think of scandalous as in scandalous behaviors, but scandalous teaching: the adding or taking away from the pure and priceless gospel of Jesus Christ, bad theology that perverts the gospel of grace. History has shown that scandalous teachers falsely add works and rules that come from their own minds, not the mind of God. They teach works as the way to get right with God. They devalue God's love by adding conditions to his love. They devalue grace by adding works. They devalue his sacrifice on the cross by saying, “His death isn't enough, it isn't free, you have to earn salvation, earn forgiveness and earn his justification.” Paul says watch out for those who pervert our valuable gospel of grace with heresy. What does Paul say to do with those preaching heresy? He doesn't say burn them at the stake or even to debate them. Paul says run from

them. Why are they able to deceive? Because they are smooth with words. They sell themselves. They gain power over people who struggle with pride by flattering them. They attract insecure people to their cause by telling them they are useful and that their work is from God. They give people in despair false hope by making impossible promises to them. They avoid the truth when telling the truth is particularly uncomfortable.

You want to know how to recognize a false teacher? A false teacher fails to obey the truths of scripture. The more you know of God's Word and the more you obey the more you can build up and protect God's church from attack. That word for innocent mean to survive a siege, stay intact after an attack of the enemy. Evil will certainly attack. Count on it, Paul is saying, stay vigilant, stay wise.

A very important lesson I learned from a mentor years ago was: “Except for the Bible itself, approach everything else you read, every seminar you attend, every popular speaker you listen to with a healthy dose of skepticism. They are fallen sinners just like you.” Paul doesn't want us to forget in these last words in Romans that we are in a spiritual battle.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you (v. 20).

It's right for us to link verses 17-19 to verse 20. In verse 20 Paul is telling us that Satan is behind these dividers and bad teachers. But Paul wastes no words telling us that one day soon these false teachers that hurt the church and compromise the gospel and lay unnecessary burdens on people will be crushed.

In the scripture Satan's defeat is marked in three tenses. He was defeated at the cross of Calvary through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And Satan will be defeated in the future when on that final day we know as the Day of the Lord the one called Faithful and True will come again and deliver us and crush Satan for eternity. And meanwhile in the present, Satan is being defeated today in the lives of believers as God protects and grows us. Paul is telling us that with God's grace we should expect some partial victories, some partial crushings as we use the weapons God gives us. Paul says in Ephesians 6:12, *“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

There are two weapons that crush Satan under our feet as he attempts to divide and conquer and devalue the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our first weapon is the Word of God. Our reading, our preaching, our meditating on the Living Word of Truth demolishes false teachings. Our second weapon to crush Satan is prayer. Prayer allows us to call on God's power to open up deceived minds to God's Truth. And prayer allows us to call on God's power to apply God's Truth with wisdom and with God's

authority to break spiritual strongholds in those we love who suffer from spiritual attack. Every faith story we hear at CPC is another story of Satan being crushed under our feet all because of the valuable gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is so valuable that we must protect it. It is also so valuable that we need to stay together in community to share it with others. For Paul to fulfill his calling as an apostle he needed other capable people around him to help him share the gospel with Gentiles. As the Warriors demonstrated last week that a good bench brings success, so Paul needed a good bench too.

Remember last week we read a long list of names of men and women in Rome that he looked forward to seeing when he visited them in Rome. Here a few verses later he gives a shorter list of names of people who were some of his top aids and closest friends who were with him in Corinth where he wrote Romans. Without these people the gospel would not have gone out to the Gentiles.

The Gospel is So Valuable We Must Stay Together in Community to Share It

Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews. I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings (verses 21-24).

Remember this guy Timothy? Paul met him on his first missionary journey and he became one of Paul's closest friends and one of his most capable assistants. Paul names three other men who have joined his band of ministers. Lucius was probably one of the prophets and teachers ministering in Antioch who heard God's instructions to send out Paul and Barnabas from Acts 13:1. Paul met Jason in Thessalonica where he was impressed by Jason's bravery when he was arrested by a mob in Acts 17:5-9, then Sosipater who joined the band of brothers when Paul was ministering in Berea. My sense from this is that Paul didn't have the best penmanship and Tertius was the guy who got an "A" in penmanship. Tertius was the guy who would write the final copy of the letter. It's interesting that Tertius means third, which means that he was likely a slave who was only given the name for third slave, yet even a slave in earthly bondage was instrumental to copy a letter that would set billions of people free from spiritual bondage. "I the third" who wrote down this letter greet you in the Lord. I love it, in the same breath he records greetings from the director of public works he records greetings from Quartus, literally fourth, another slave. He must have been thrilled that Paul called him a brother.

We are not meant to journey alone. In some seasons we are to take others along—likely the next generation—and mentor them along the way. In some seasons we are to work alongside

and embrace the gifts, talents and willingness of others to work together to advance the gospel message in the world. In some seasons we may be struggling with discouragement so much that others are actually carrying us forward to that next place of service. I've experienced all of this over the course of my life.

So we reach the end of the letter. Usually Paul ends with a benediction that is a recording of good wishes or blessings to close off something. But these last three verses are a doxology. A doxology is a praise to God for what God has done in his life. Paul is giving God the glory for the most valuable thing he has been given in the world—the Gospel.

The Gospel is So Valuable We Must Praise God for It

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, 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—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen (verses 25-27).

He says, "My Gospel." Paul isn't saying he invented it, he is saying he owns it and is forever connected to it. From "able" we get the word dynamite. It's encouraging to think that it takes God's dynamite to break through disbelief and hard hearts. Paul is praising him who is powerfully and dynamically capable of not only breaking through hardened hearts but to also establish you and me for his glory. The idea of establish means to become mentally settled, firmly rooted in the truth of the gospel. Romans teaches us the most valuable thing in the world: God is able to lift you from shaky ground and establish you on a firm foundation. We don't need new or improved good news to become established. Stir up what you have. Don't go looking for other spiritual treasures in dusty corners of your heart hoping to find a more valuable treasure. It doesn't exist. Let the gospel stir in your heart; there is flavor there. Stir it up, get back to the main thing and let that flavor burst into your life and circumstances. God alone is able. Paul is saying don't ever forget who this valuable gospel is about. It isn't about you. It's about Jesus Christ, God's Son. The major theme of Romans, like the major theme of all Scripture, is Jesus Christ.

It would be interesting to hear from someone new to CPC the answer to this question, "From your first impressions of CPC, what seems to be the most important thing to us? I hope your impression is that it's Jesus Christ. That the people at CPC seek to know Jesus better and commit to him and his Word as authentic followers of Christ." The gospel is valuable, not because it is old, but because of what it says. And what it says is revealed in the scriptures. At one time in history the gospel wasn't fully understood. The prophets of the Old Testament heard bits and

pieces but they didn't have the whole story to put it all together. The gospel remained a mystery until the complete truth of Jesus Christ was fully revealed when he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. The purpose of the Gospel is to draw out from all of us an obedience to Jesus Christ that always involves faith, faith at the point of our conversion and faith and trust every day after that. Someone once said, "True faith that God loves always shows up in our lives as obedience."

Paul ends his letter by reminding us that only God is wise enough to think up this valuable Gospel. The sad thing is that the world continues to regard the gospel as foolishness, but in reality it is from the only wise God. And God uses this gospel that saves us to display his glory. For us as we sit here today, we can only come to God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can only glorify God through Jesus Christ. As the great Westminster Catechism says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." The goal of the gospel is to display God's glory. There are such wonderful pictures of God's glory in our Bible.

There is a wonderful illustration in the Old Testament that helps us understand God's glory. The Shekinah glory was the visible presence of God's glory among the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. The visible glory of God guided the people each day and then settled down on the Tabernacle when they camped. By day it was a pillar of cloud. By night it became a pillar of fire. When it came to rest on the Tabernacle, the glory of God actually entered the most holy place and rested between the wings of the cherubim above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. It became a bright intense light. The holy presence of God was so powerful and so terrible that no one could enter the Most Holy Place and live. Many tried to approach God's glory for themselves and they were struck down.

We fast forward to the gospel of Matthew and read that at the precise moment that Jesus died something incredible happened

in the temple in Jerusalem. Matthew said, "*at that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom.*" The curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place, which was to house the Ark of the Covenant, was removed. So beyond the torn veil was the path into the presence of God, into the very presence of his glory. This incredible picture shows us that the way to God was opened up by the death of Jesus Christ.

Without the gospel, none of us could approach the only wise and holy God and live. Because of the gospel—even the least religious, even the most religious, the least even the greatest sinner, and the most joyless legalist, even the most guilty, the most shameful, the most hypocritical—can all have their burdens removed and laid at the foot of the cross and glorify God. Every one of us can approach the throne of God boldly, joyfully, without fear or condemnation and offer worship that the Father will accept and in return find grace and mercy in our time of need. All this is possible only through the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did at one moment in time that changed everything. All of this is possible because of the gospel.

So we say along with Paul about his most valuable gospel:

**"Guard the gospel message that has established us
Share it with all people....
So they might come to obedient faith....
To God be the glory!
To the only wise God be glory forever through
Jesus Christ. Amen."**

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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