

Romans 1:8-17 Paul's Longing to Visit Rome, the Theme of Righteousness, and Living by Faith

Text

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. ⁹For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Key Points in the text

- Through Christian Fellowship we strengthen each other's faith.
- The faith that we live by is not our own, it is a gift of grace, this is the faith referred to when we say we are saved Sola Feide (By Faith Alone).

Text Study

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Key points from each verse:

- Verse 8, Paul is talking about the known world, which for this audience would be the Mediterranean region. Although the word Paul uses actually means universe or cosmos, or all of creation.
- Verse 9 A reminder to you that this is not just saying it is about His Son, but that it is a possession of God's and therefore not something we can change to fit our needs.
- Verse 10, Paul is explaining his constant prayers for them and to see them. This is a good reminder and example to remember our church in our prayers.
- Verse 11, Paul is talking about a grace gift, such as praying with them, teaching them further, and fellowship. This he wants to do with the goal of them being rooted in the gospel. They have a faith, Paul wants to establish it and make it firm.
- Verse 12, Paul gives another example and encouragement related to our church life, by fellowshiping and sharing what God is showing us in our walk we encourage the faith of those we are talking with.

- Verse 13, The word fruit here means harvest, Paul longs to see the harvest of believers that has been formed from the preaching of the gospel. By doing this he will be encouraged because of his involvement in that work.
- Verse 14, Again Paul refers to the idea of him being a bond-servant to God to preach the gospel. Here he says he is under obligation but the idea is the same, he was a slave to sin but is now a slave to the gospel.

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Paul's chain of reasoning:

- Paul has said he is eager to share the gospel with them
- Why is he eager to do this? Because he is not ashamed of the gospel.
- Why is he not ashamed of the gospel? Because it is the power of God for salvation.
 - Short hand, I am not ashamed because I am convinced of the power of the gospel to save everyone who believes.
- Why is the gospel the power (means) to salvation? Because it reveals the righteousness of God.

Unpacking verse 17

What is the righteousness of God?

- It is an attribute of God, and is therefore infinite, and fully reflects all His other attributes, such as: Just, Loving, Holy, and,,
- It is an action, as in God is activity righteous in His actions to fulfill what He has promised. Such as His actively reaching out to rescue people as He said he would do. This is therefore an expression of His power to save, fulfill His Faithfulness, Love, Righteousness. See Psalm 98:2-3 The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
- A free gift to believers, a giving of a legal status of righteousness, given by grace and without merit.
- Summary: His activity of reaching out to rescue all who trust in Christ by giving them, as an undeserved gift, a right status before Him. In other words, it is the doctrine of justification by grace alone received by faith alone.

What does it mean to say the gospel reveals God's righteousness?

- This is an action of God, we touched on this some in the first question. God is revealing His righteousness that He was doing all through the Old Testament, but now He is showing the how and why of it. Augustine is believed to have said that the Old Testament sets up a room with all the furniture placed but not lit, and we can only see it dimly, the gospel turns on the light so we can say, ah I see what you have been doing.

What does it mean that this, revealing, is from 'faith to faith'?

- This righteousness that we receive is, as Martin Luther said, 'an alien righteousness'. Meaning that it is the righteousness of Jesus. We receive it because of His faithfulness, which results in our faith. From His Faithfulness to Our Faith.

How does the verse from Habakkuk help us to understand this better?

- Chapter 1 of Habakkuk is used here (as well as in Galatians and Hebrews) because it is talking about how the believer waits for the appointed time when God's promises will be fulfilled. It talks

about two kinds of people, one (the righteous) that will wait for God to do it in His time and the other (the unbeliever) who thinks he can rescue himself, or make his own god to do it.

Application

- Fellowship with one-another, sharing with them what God is doing in your life, sharing with them in prayer, and sharing with them in word.
- Think on this idea of being ashamed of the gospel, realize ways that you demonstrate the faith God has given you to believe in the gospel, also realize that ways that you have been hesitant to share the gospel and ask God to reveal to you why, and increase your faith so that you can be eager to share the gospel.
- As you do your devotions and you see the word faith, think of what we learned about our faith being a gift and being a reflection of God's faithfulness not something we generate within us.

Next Week's Lesson Prep/Preview

Text: Romans 1:18-32

Focus: God's Wrath Against Unrighteousness

Devotional: Genesis 1:26-31

Preparation: Read articles about General and Special Revelation.

General Revelation [W. Robert Godfrey](#)

Nothing is more important than knowing God as He truly is. For this reason, the church has confessed many truths about our God throughout history. God is the eternal Trinity, the almighty Creator, the wise Sustainer, the effective Redeemer, and the coming Judge. One truth not so clearly articulated in our creeds is that God is the trustworthy Revealer. To know God as He is, He must reveal Himself to us.

Because God is infinite, He cannot be fully comprehended by finite creatures. We are blinded to God's truth by our sin. But even before sin entered the world, we needed God to tell us about Himself. God has always been a revealer of Himself both in His words and in His works. He spoke to Adam in the garden of Eden to reveal Himself and displayed aspects of His character in the works of creation that surrounded Adam. Theologians have called God's words—spoken at first and later written down—His special revelation, while they have called His works of creation and providence His general revelation. General revelation is, well, general (those theologians know what they are talking about), whereas special revelation is much more specific, detailed, and extensive. Today, general revelation surrounds us in nature, while we possess special revelation in the Bible. Special revelation tells God's people everything revealed about His character in general revelation and much more.

What exactly, then, is general revelation, and why is it significant? Some suggest that the natural sciences are the study of general revelation and so go beyond special revelation. But since the Enlightenment, the natural sciences have typically studied creation not to know God but to know creation, and therefore are not focused on general revelation through creation. General revelation, properly speaking, is God's clear display of His glory and power in the works of creation and providence. As the Scriptures explain: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" ([Ps. 19:1-2](#)).

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. ([Rom. 1:19-20](#))

Many years ago, Joan Baez, the celebrated folk singer, introduced a song at one of her concerts. She was about to sing "The Dangling Conversation," a song with the refrain: "Be not too hard, for life is short and nothing is given to man." She told how she had been watching a beautiful sunset with the writer of the song and had asked, "How can you look at such beauty and say that nothing is given to man?" The writer thought a moment and replied, "Well, the beauty is loaned, not really given." The psalmist would have smiled and interjected: "Whether the beauty of the sunset is given or only loaned, it points unmistakably and unavoidably to the Divine One who gives or loans. That is the necessary character of general revelation."

Sinners can resist and deny this general revelation, but they cannot escape it. All nature, all the time, shouts out the existence, power, and splendor of God. Sinners can close their eyes and stop their ears, but general revelation remains plain all around them. Only when the unrighteous actively suppress this plain truth can the testimony of general revelation be denied. Such suppression is wicked and foolish. So the Scriptures rightly declare: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good" ([Ps. 14:1](#)).

This general revelation is an inevitable result of God's works of creation and providence. But what purpose does it serve? In the first place, general revelation is a great encouragement and support to believers throughout their lives: "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever" ([Ps. 111:2-3](#)). But there is another vital function of general revelation in this fallen world as well. Paul expressed this function powerfully: "So they are without excuse" ([Rom. 1:20](#)). Sinners are full of excuses: "I would believe if only I could see God or could hear God." Paul says sinners have no legitimate excuses. Those who have rejected God's general revelation would not have profited from His special revelation. Indeed, all of us sinners would reject both forms of God's revelation apart from God's special, merciful work of regeneration in the hearts of His people.

Surely, it would be presumptuous for us to add to the Apostles' Creed. But it might well be an improvement to say: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, the revealer, and the maker of heaven and earth." Praise God the Revealer.

Special Revelation

In the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was written by men who embraced the biblical theology of the Protestant Reformation, we read that although natural, or general, revelation manifests the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, it is insufficient "to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation" (WCF 1.1). However, God did not leave us without revelation that teaches us how we can be saved. Thus, "it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in diverse manners, to reveal himself, and to declare" His will of salvation to His people (1.1). Here, the confession references what we call "special revelation."

Special revelation is that revelation from God that tells us the way of salvation and what it means to live in a manner that pleases Him. Typically, we identify Scripture as special revelation, and this is correct. Yet, in the history of His people, God has provided special revelation through other means as well. Note that the confession speaks of "diverse ways" in which special revelation has been given. If we look at the history of God's people, we can see why it says such a thing. Consider today's passage, for example, wherein Joseph interprets dreams given to two members of Pharaoh's court. He specifically attributes dreams and their interpretation to God Himself ([Gen. 40:8](#)). So, at least at that early point in history, God sometimes spoke to people and revealed His will through dreams.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, we see that the Lord also revealed His will to Israel through the priestly Urim and Thummim. Although we do not know exactly what the Urim and Thummim were, they were most likely stones or sticks of different colors that could be drawn from the breastplate in order to discern God's purposes. Prayer would be offered, and if the Urim was drawn, it would mean to do one thing, and if the Thummim was drawn, it would mean to do something else ([Ex. 28:30](#); [1 Sam. 14:41](#)).

We could multiply examples of the different forms in which special revelation once came. The most important of these, however, is the form of writing. When God spoke to His people, individuals such as Moses, the prophets, the Apostles, and others wrote down that revelation our Lord wanted us to have in perpetuity ([Ex. 24:4](#); [Jer. 36:4](#); [2 Peter 3:15](#)). As we will see, special revelation ceased by the end of the first century, so the only special revelation we have today is the written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Coram Deo

Many people are looking for a revelation from God in our day. We do not need to go looking for new special revelation, however, for we have all the revelation for how to serve God available to us in Scripture. If we want to know the will of God for our salvation and for our lives, we must study and know the Old and New Testaments.