

The Theme of Romans

Romans 1:8-17

Romans 1:8-17 - *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰ making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*

¹³ Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵ So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

Background Notes

The format of 1st century letters was to first write a greeting and then a section of thanksgiving. Many of Paul's epistles follow this format, including the letter to the Romans. Verses 1-7 form the greeting of the letter, as we have seen. Verse 8 begins the section of thanksgiving: *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."* Paul was thankful for the believers at Rome, and he was thankful for their faithful Christian testimony which he says was known throughout the whole world -- that is, throughout the Roman Empire!

Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians around AD 57 or 58. It wouldn't be long before the Roman persecutions would begin, following the great fire in Rome in AD 64. Remember, the Roman Emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the fire, and thus the Roman persecution of Christians began. Some of these Roman Christians to whom Paul was writing this letter would be martyred for their faith in Christ. Would we have been so faithful? It's a good question to ask ourselves.

In this section of thanksgiving, Paul told his brothers and sisters in Rome that he was praying for them (v9). That's a great lesson for us, by the way. We should pray for our brothers and sisters around the world – especially those who are undergoing difficulty and persecution. But Paul was not only praying for them -- he was planning to visit them. He said that he wanted to impart some spiritual gift to them (v11). The idea here is that they would experience spiritual blessing as a result of ministry from the apostle Paul. Notice from verse 12, however, that it would not be a "one-way street."

“That is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” Not only were the Christians at Rome to be established and encouraged by Paul’s ministry to them, but Paul himself would also be encouraged by their faith and by their ministry to him. It goes both ways! That is the way it works in the body of Christ – mutual encouragement and edification. Let’s take this message, for example. I’m preaching to you, and I trust that you’re being encouraged and edified by this ministry from Romans 1. But at the same time, I’m being encouraged and built up in the faith by your response, and by some of the things that you have already shared with me.

Doctrinal Points

Our doctrinal points come from verses 16-17, which could be considered the theme verses from the book of Romans: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”*

1. The gospel of God reveals the power of God.

Verse 16 says that the gospel is "the power of God to salvation." *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”* The good news is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not just a "nice story about the greatest man who ever lived." It's not just a true story. In fact, it is more than a true story that God became man in order to provide salvation for mankind. The point is that it's not only true, it is the **power of God**; it **works!** Intrinsic to the gospel is the power of God, the power to save and transform lives if and when the good news is believed.

Have you experienced that power? When you believe the good news of Jesus Christ, and receive Him as your Savior, it's not like joining a new religion. No, the power of God saves you from the eternal penalty of your sins, and gives you power for living now. Lately I've been helping to disciple a man who is a new Christian. What a blessing it is to see his life and lifestyle being transformed by God! No other world religion is like this -- only the gospel of Christ has the power of God.

And the gospel of God works for anyone! The gospel went out to the Jews first, but then to the whole world (v16). It can save anyone regardless of race, or religious background, or sinful background. The gospel of God reveals the power of God.

2. The gospel of God reveals the righteousness of God.

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith” (v17). How is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel? In a number of ways! First of all, God doesn't lower His righteous

standards in order to save sinful people. Even though we are saved by God's grace and mercy, He doesn't compromise His righteous standards in order to save us. So certainly the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.

We see the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel in the sacrifice of Christ. In order to sacrifice the righteous claims of God against sin, a perfect sacrifice had to be substituted for us. Christ was that perfect sinless sacrifice. His sinless perfection reveals the righteousness of God.

Furthermore, (and this may be the main point that Paul is driving at here), we see the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel in the way believers are made righteous. It is by **faith**, not by works. In salvation, the believer is **declared** righteous; we are given the righteousness of God by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 (familiar verses, right?): *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."* Now if salvation was by works, or even partly by works, then the righteousness of God would be lowered and contaminated by man's less than perfect efforts. But salvation is not by works -- it is by faith! *"The just shall live by faith" (v17)!*

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." It is faith all the way -- from faith to faith -- that is, the principle of faith from start to finish. The gospel in no way mixes the works of man in with the righteousness of God, or the righteousness of God would no longer be the 100% righteousness of God. Do you understand that? A man who comes to our home Bible study still doesn't understand this. He has been attending for years, but he still thinks that somehow our human efforts and good works assist God in our salvation. No! Good works have their place in the believer's life **after** salvation, but they have no place for the unbeliever for coming to salvation. Don't distort the revelation of God's righteousness with an unbiblical gospel. The gospel of God reveals the righteousness of God.

Practical Applications

1. Are you paying off your debts?

I'm not talking here about college loans or credit cards -- let's hope that we're paying off those debts! But we are in debt to a number of people if we haven't shared the gospel with them. Look at verse 14: *"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise."* For the apostle Paul, sharing the gospel was not an option! He saw it as a debt to pay -- and so should we. In our daily lives, the Lord brings us into contact with many people from all walks of life -- *"Greeks and barbarians, wise and unwise,"* as it were. We are the means that God uses to get the good news to them.

It is our responsibility. It's not an option. It is as much a responsibility as a debt we must pay! Are you paying off your debts?

2. Are you ashamed of the gospel?

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek...” In the context here, Paul was not thinking about having the courage to bow your head in a restaurant and thank God for your food, or having the guts to stand on a street corner and preach the gospel, although it could be applied that way. However, Paul's main point here is that we don't have to be ashamed of the gospel -- as if we've kissed our brains goodbye to believe it! No! The gospel can go up against **any** world view or philosophy and **prevail** -- both then and today! Believing in the gospel is not a blind leap of faith. The gospel makes sense. It has the answers, and it works! It's the power of God for salvation to anyone who believes.

You don't have to apologize for being a Christian. Are you ashamed of the gospel?

3. Don't be discouraged if God says “No” to your godly plans.

Verse 13 says, *“Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.”* Paul had planned to go to Rome to minister to the Christians. These were godly plans, right? He was going to Rome to preach, but he was "hindered." How? We don't know, but in some way God said "No" to Paul's godly plans. But Paul was not discouraged because he knew that God was in control.

Paul finally did get to Rome, but not as he had planned. He went to Rome as a prisoner -- but even then he was not discouraged, because he knew that God's plans were sovereign and God was fully in control. What a lesson for us! Don't be discouraged if God says "No" to your godly plans!