

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH

Romans 1:1-17

Key Verse: 1:17

“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

Today we begin the study of the book of Romans. It was written by Paul about A.D. 57, most likely while he stayed in Corinth during his third missionary journey. At the time, Paul hoped to see the believers in Rome soon, but it was uncertain. So he wrote this letter. Paul had not pioneered the church in Rome. He was writing to many people he did not know personally. For this reason, Romans is not a personal letter like 1 Corinthians. Romans is a logical, systematic and thorough exposition of the gospel with universal application. It was written in light of God’s great world mission purpose. Paul wanted to establish Rome as a world mission headquarters.

Today’s passage, Romans 1:1-17, is the introduction to the book. It contains a most famous key verse: “The righteous will live by faith” (17). This is the theme of Romans. There are many things to learn in this book, but most of all, we want to learn Paul’s great faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and his world mission vision.

First, Paul, the servant of Christ Jesus (1).

Look at verse 1. “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...” Paul was a servant of Christ Jesus. His personal relationship with Jesus was so deep and so real that Paul describes himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. A servant does not claim his human rights; he submits to his master. A servant does not advertise his own identity; he acts and works on behalf of his master. Paul acknowledged Jesus Christ as his Lord and King. He was not his own man; he was a servant of Christ Jesus.

Paul was called to be an apostle. No one can make himself an apostle. This calling came from God. In the strict sense of the word, an apostle was one who had been chosen and designated by Jesus. This refers to the Twelve. Paul was not with Jesus during his earthly ministry. However, Paul claimed to be an apostle on par with Peter. He did so on the basis of his personal encounter with the Risen Christ. Peter agreed, recognizing Paul’s ministry (Gal 2:7) and Paul’s epistles as Scripture (2Pe 3:15-16). In a broader sense of the word, “apostle” is the same as “missionary.” It is one who is sent to proclaim the gospel to others. We pray for raising one million missionaries in America in this century. It is God alone who calls and sends out missionaries.

Paul was set apart for the gospel of God. In Acts 13:3, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” From that time on, Paul dedicated his life fully to his missionary calling. He did not dabble in a variety of Christian activities, but dedicated himself fully to his missionary calling. He did not live by the trend of the world; he lived in God’s history moment by moment.

In Galatians 1:15 Paul said, “But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace....” As Paul came to know God through Christ, he realized that God had set him apart from birth to be an apostle to the Gentiles. His identity as a servant of Christ Jesus was not based on his conversion experience alone, but on the sovereign rule of God over history. Paul’s identity as a servant of Christ Jesus was absolute. It was the basis of his spiritual authority and power. One man who has an absolute identity as a servant of Christ Jesus can be used to change world history. May God help each of us to have such a clear identity.

Second, the gospel of God (2-4).

In verse 1 Paul calls the gospel “the gospel of God.” The gospel is sometimes referred to as “the gospel of Christ” (Ro 15:19), or as “my gospel” (Ro 2:16). But here Paul calls it “the gospel of God.” It is to emphasize that the gospel is not a man-made story; the gospel is precisely the work of God who rules history. Look at verse 2. “...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures....” God first promised the gospel to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. They felt defeated after the Fall. But God promised victory over the devil through the offspring of a woman. Later, to Abraham, God said, “...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed...” (Gen 22:18). As Galatians 3:8 explains, this was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ to bring forgiveness of sins to all who believe in him. Still later, to David, God promised to raise up his descendant to reign

on his throne forever (2Sa 7:11b-16). This was fulfilled by Christ who rose from the dead as the eternal King of the kingdom of heaven (Lk 1:31-33; Isa 55:3; Ac 13:34). In addition to these promises, many prophecies were fulfilled exactly by Jesus. Psalm 22 foretells the scene of Jesus' crucifixion. It mentions people hurling insults at Jesus, Jesus' bones being out of joint, Jesus' heart melting, Jesus' tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth, Jesus being pierced in the hands and feet, and people dividing his garments by casting lots. It was foretold one thousand years before Christ and fulfilled exactly at the cross. To any student of Scripture, it is crystal clear that God orchestrates history to accomplish world salvation. The gospel is the gospel of God.

Since the gospel is the gospel of God, we can trust the gospel with all our hearts and make a life commitment. The gospel is not a human idea like Communism. Those who trusted in Communism experienced utter failure; so will evolutionists. But the gospel is the gospel of God. God is faithful. God rules history. We can believe the gospel, for in this ever changing world, it is the unchanging truth of God.

The gospel is about Jesus Christ. Look at verses 3-4. "...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." In regards to his humanity, Jesus was the son of David. He met the stringent human qualifications as the Messiah. In addition, God declared with power that Jesus is the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. Jesus is risen! Jesus is living! Jesus gives eternal life to all who believe in him. The gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Third, we received grace and apostleship (5).

Look at verse 5. "Through him and for his name's sake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." The phrase "for his name's sake" means for the glory of Christ. God's world salvation work is for the glory of Christ. For the glory of Christ, Paul and all believers have received grace and apostleship. Grace is the grace of forgiveness of sins. Sin brings guilt and condemnation. Sin opens the door to the devil's mischief. There is nothing we can do to solve our sin problem. But Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood for our sins. Jesus has the authority to forgive our sins. Jesus forgives us, though we don't deserve it at all. On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). A robber, being crucified for his crime, heard Jesus' prayer. He believed Jesus' grace of forgiveness. He prayed, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:42,43). Without doing anything good, simply by asking for Jesus' grace, this man received forgiveness of sins and entered paradise with Jesus. This grace is available to us all.

All who receive the grace of Jesus also receive apostleship to call people to the obedience that comes from faith. What a great privilege it is! God wants to use us as his instruments to call others to obedience. This happens when we share the word of God with others. Of course, not everyone responds well. But there are some who will obey the word of God as the absolute truth. They commit their lives to Jesus.

The last part of verse 5 says, "...to the obedience that comes from faith." Paul saw that the result of saving faith is obedience. Mere intellectual assent is not faith. Those who really believe that Jesus is God will obey him from their hearts. In verse 5, Paul clearly said that we must call people to the obedience that comes from faith. Of course, this obedience is to the word of God. Jesus said, "...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20a). We must teach people to tithe according to God's word. We must teach people to marry a real Christian by faith, according to God's will. We must teach people to obey the world mission command by faith.

Fourth, Paul's prayer for the Romans (7-15).

Verses 7-15 reveal Paul's prayer for the Roman Christians. They were not his sheep. He did not know many of them. Yet he prayed for them continually on the basis of God's will to pioneer Rome. Paul wanted to impart to them a spiritual gift to make them strong. Most likely this was God's world mission vision based on the Scriptures. This would really strengthen the Romans. Most of them were struggling hard just to survive. They might have had an immigrant's mentality. But Paul wanted them to have world mission vision. Paul wanted them to have faith in God to see Rome as the headquarters for world mission. Paul wanted them to become more than conquerors with gospel faith.

Paul was motivated by his deep sense of God's grace. Look at verses 14,15. "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome." Paul had received the forgiveness of sins and God's holy mission freely by grace. He did not deserve it at all. He could never pay it back. But he felt compelled to "pay it forward." He felt obligated to help all people in the whole world know the marvelous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In particular he mentions the Greeks and non-Greeks. This may refer to those in frat houses, as well as those in the dorms. At that time, Greek was the language and culture of the elite. Paul felt obligated to the cultural elite as well as to the common man. Paul also mentions the wise and the foolish. This probably refers to the educated and the uneducated. Paul believed the superiority of the gospel and diligently preached to the cultural and intellectual elite. However, he did not discriminate against lower class people. In the end, these human distinctions do not matter at all. All that matters is having faith in the gospel. We see true universality in Paul which came from his gospel faith. Here we realize that we must have the universality of the gospel in our hearts. On this basis, we can pray for peoples of all nations to come to know Christ.

Fifth, I am not ashamed of the gospel (16).

Look at verse 16. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. Paul did not value the ever changing worldly consensus or the opinion of the ungodly. Paul was not trying to please people. He knew that the gospel was the truth of God and the only way of salvation for all mankind.

The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. When we believe the gospel, something happens in our hearts. The power of sin loses its grip. The power of God begins to form us into a new creation in Christ. We can overcome fear. We can live powerful lives of mission as soldiers of Christ. Shepherd Arthur Miranda was once so quiet that many did not know he existed, though he was in UBF for ten years. But the power of the gospel has been working in his heart. Through Acts study, he accepted God's calling to live as a one-to-one Bible teacher. He began fishing at NU during his lunch hour. For a long time, nothing seemed to happen. By faith, he held on to God's word of promise. Then, last Friday, God granted him a harvest. Two students, one boy and one girl, eagerly agreed to study the Bible with him. The power of God is changing him into a courageous shepherd.

Sixth, the righteous will live by faith (17).

Look at verse 17. "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" Here, "righteousness from God" refers to Jesus Christ (1Co 1:30). God in his righteousness should have destroyed all people because of their sins. But God did not condemn people. Instead, he condemned his one and only Son on the cross. Thus he satisfied his righteousness. Also, he justified people to be righteous before him. Through Jesus we are justified to be righteous before God, though we are not righteous at all. Living by faith means to believe absolutely that we are saved by God's grace and that we have salvation only in Jesus. Jesus is our righteousness.

Verse 17 contains the phrase, "from first to last." This means that from the beginning of God's history to the end, God saves people only by faith. For example, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Ge 15:6). The words, "The righteous will live by faith" are a quote from the prophet Habakkuk. He complained to God when he saw only injustice and violence against his people. Then God promised that the kingdom of God would surely come in God's time. Habakkuk believed this promise and could rejoice and praise God. The phrase "from first to last" also applies to the individual lives of faith of each person. We accept Jesus by faith. Then we must live by faith to the end, until we pass through the pearly gate into the kingdom of God. There is never a time that we can say, "I am okay now. I don't need Jesus anymore." Paul struggled hard to keep his faith. In the end he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2Ti 4:7). We must live by faith in God's promises from the beginning to the end.

Look at verse 17 again. "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" Living by faith is the Christian lifestyle. While others desperately seek to solve their future security problem, Christians seek God's kingdom and trust God for their future security. While others despair over the evil world and the power of death and live a corrupted life, Christians believe the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. So we live a holy life with undying hope and pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. There have been many kinds of lifestyles down through the generations. Scientific

people want to live by human reason. Romantic people want to live by their feelings. Religious people want to live by their ritual practices or their own moral standard. But in the final analysis, there are only two kinds of people: those who live by faith and those who do not. Verse 17 says clearly, “The righteous will live by faith.”

Through the study of Romans, may God help us to learn the gospel faith of St. Paul. May God help us to accept Jesus as our righteousness and live by faith from first to last. May God use us to call others to the life of faith with conviction and joy.