

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD “REVEALED”

Romans 1:13–17

Key Verse: 1:17

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

Do you ever feel like you’re getting nowhere? Life can sometimes seem like there’s a giant scoreboard over our heads. Every time we say or do something good, we expect our score to go up. When we fail, we dread to see it go down. We run ourselves ragged trying to move up our score, but it still feels like our scoreboard is broken. No matter how hard we play, we’re still at the bottom, zero, losing. In other words, we’re playing a game we can never win, because we’re trying to prove a “righteousness” we don’t actually have.

Today we’re looking at the end of Paul’s introduction to his letter to the Romans. So far, he’s introduced himself, greeted his readers, and shared his vision to come to Rome and his fervent prayers for them (1–12). Now, he’s more specific about why he’s so eager, and he gets into the essence of what he wants to share (13–17). Verse 17 is Paul’s main point for this entire letter. Paul is saying so much in this one verse, but it can be summed up with the word “gospelized.” As we truly encounter our living Lord Jesus, something amazing happens. We’re changed from the inside out, from our thinking and hearts to the way we see the world, our goals, our behavior—even what and who we love. This “gospelized” change is what verse 17 describes. This “righteousness of God” is a living power that we receive and live out entirely by faith. But it happens only as we grasp what the righteousness of God “revealed” to us means. How is it revealed to us? Do we need to be struck by lightning? Paul says the revelation comes “from faith,” meaning when we believe. May God speak to us through his word today.

So how can we begin to understand this? Before we look at the words on the page in chapter 1, we should look at the map of the universe Paul is using. In the last half of chapter 5 he defines two distinct worlds: the era of Adam and the era of Christ (12–21). It may seem like an obscure part of Romans, but those ten verses are foundational to our understanding of the whole letter. The first era is dominated by sin and death, with no way out, and the second, by grace and life. The first era is when we were in Adam; the second, when we are in Christ. This radical shift in eras gets at the heart of the “gospelized” change in verse 17. God revealed his righteousness in his divine power to transfer us out of Adam and into Christ. The rest of Romans simply unfolds this new reality. In light of our

transfer from Adam to Christ, let's look at Paul's words to see how a "gospelized" life unfolds. We'll think about the meaning of "the revelation" in four ways: 1) "righteousness"; 2) "the righteousness of God"; 3) "...is revealed"; 4) "faith."

Paul first mentions in verse 13 that he was prevented from visiting Rome, though he'd often tried. It highlights how serious his mission is. Then in verse 14 he says "I am obligated." He's talking about not a mechanical, legal debt, but a passion in his heart that flows from grace. Because Paul himself received the grace of God in Jesus, he's compelled to share it. This is the beauty of the new life the gospel gives. Because of the debt we owe to our Lord Jesus for his grace, we give our hearts and lives to help others know him. Paul urges in 13:8a, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other..." Like healed debtors who've been given great wealth, in Christ we're indebted to the whole world in need. Paul's eagerness to go to Rome is due to his new life in Christ. Now, in the great love of God, he longs for people to know how to be saved as he was (5:8–10).

Next, Paul talks about a "power" (15–16). He's eager to preach the gospel in Rome not because of his own eloquence or persuasive ability, but because he has a fearless confidence in the message itself. He is not ashamed of this message—not even in the world's most powerful city—because it's a divine, explosive power. The gospel is the only power that breaks the rule of sin and death that keeps us living in Adam and radically transfers us into the new, "in Christ" era. It's not a wise philosophy or moral code; it's the one and only power strong enough to save and keep those who believe—even the most powerless person. Notice how verses 16 and 17 are vitally connected, as both begin with "For." Paul is saying that the gospel, "the power of God" (16), is the *place* where "the righteousness of God" is "revealed" (17). So the gospel is the unveiling of a saving power—the very righteousness of God. In these two verses Paul is proclaiming that the gospel is not only theology; it's the living power of the living God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (1:4). This power of the gospel brings the righteousness of God into the reality of this broken world. Let's read verse 17. Let's explore several aspects here.

First, "righteousness." Humanly, righteousness is moral perfection, a perfect record, worthiness earned by never failing. It's our score on the "scoreboard," earned by our performance. Honestly, it's the righteousness we don't have. More than that, righteousness means a right relationship, an intimate relationship with God (8:15–16), and from that relationship, close relationships with others. When we live in Adam under sin, these relationships are severed. We don't really come to God, and we don't truly get close to others; we're just stuck—wrapped up in ourselves. To change, we need radical intervention.

Second, “the righteousness of God.” Paul’s addition of the phrase “of God” changes everything. It’s not a standard we reach but a gift God gives. We receive this “righteousness of God” apart from the law and through faith in Jesus Christ (3:21–22). This is the powerful intervention we need: God’s free, abundant, shocking grace to us. This grace is free—we pay nothing for it; abundant—it covers over the huge ugly pile of all our sins; and incongruous—it’s the most precious gift, but given to people who absolutely don’t deserve it. If we believe in Jesus, God credits us with the perfect, divine status of Jesus, fully and freely. God declares that because we are “in Christ,” we are fully and completely right with him. All that we do from that point on is simply a response to this grace. In the Adam era the scoreboard is always on. But in the Christ era the scoreboard is replaced by a “Statement of Account.” God isn’t looking at your “stats”; he’s looking at Christ’s status, and putting your name at the top of the page.¹

Third, “is revealed.” All this perfect, divine, free righteousness God has gifted us would be useless if it remained hidden. So Paul says it “is revealed,” meaning “thrown open, laid bare, made public.” Where is it revealed? It’s in the gospel itself—the powerful message Paul is so eager to preach. In 16:25 Paul says it’s “the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages.” The gospel is not just an idea; it’s the unveiling of God’s own saving action. And notice, the verb “reveal” is in the present tense. It’s a living reality—the power that breaks the rule of sin and death and brings us into grace and life. So it’s not just something that happened in the distant past or pointing to a far-off future hope. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God as an unfolding power available right now to truly change us.

Fourth, “faith.” The final, and maybe the most challenging part of this verse is the phrase “from faith for faith.” We learn a lot about faith from Genesis and Hebrews 11. But this expression of faith in Romans 1:17 is different. Some say it’s a growing faith. But what Paul is really saying is that this entire transaction—how we are counted with God’s righteousness by the grace of Jesus—happens totally, always, and only in the realm of faith. The word “from” means that faith is the only source of this righteousness. The word “for” means that faith is the one direction for living out our new life in Christ.² This faith is not something we muster up; it’s God’s gift to us (Eph. 2:8). It’s this precious grace of God to us in his Son that first moves our hearts to faith. It’s through “hearing” the word of Christ, hearing the word of his grace, that faith “comes” and builds us up (10:17; Acts 20:32). In his grace we begin living out our faith in all aspects of our lives. It’s “from faith for faith” because we never “graduate” from needing the gift. We start by grasping the grace of Jesus, and we finish by grasping the exact same grace. Being “gospelized” means we stop trying to climb a ladder and start

¹ Paul calls this a “law of faith” that rules out trying to be righteous by works (3:27–28; 4:2,4,6; 9:32; 11:6).

² So Paul says we are to “walk in the footsteps of the faith” (4:12) and to “stand fast through faith” (11:20).

leaning on the One who reached down to us.³ It's a new, triumphant reality we have in Christ, fulfilling the prophetic words, "The righteous shall live by faith."⁴

Later, Romans says when we're justified by faith, we have "peace with God" and access to stand in grace (5:1–2). Living by faith in his grace, we're no longer ruled by sin (chapter 6), but guided by the power of the Holy Spirit (chapter 8). In this new life, we present our entire selves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, and start loving the real people in our Christian community and learning to live in full and humble harmony with them, even in our differences (chapters 12–15). It shows that we really "get" the revelation of God's grace to us in Jesus, and now we truly *are* living "by faith."

Through the lens of faith in Christ, our whole view of the world is changed. We start seeing sin the way God does (6:1–2, 11, 20–21; 7:13), our suffering the way God does (5:3–4; 8:18), our relationship with our Father God the way God does (8:15–16), our future hope the way God does (8:23–25), God's mercy on people and his hardening others the way God does (9:11, 14–18), and all the people of the world the way God sees them, not as disturbing and wretched sinners who need condemnation, but in light of the great hope they can have in Christ (15:9–13), if only someone is sent to tell them the good news (10:12–15).

Living a gospelized life is beautiful in its simplicity, but it does require intentionality. God's righteousness revealed in Christ is like the sunshine already beaming at dawn into our apartment—abundant, free, and constantly available, whether we acknowledge and appreciate it or not. The spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer are not a way to earn the light; they simply draw open the curtains to receive the light already there. As we daily bask in the sunshine of His grace, we become healthy, warm, and strong enough to help others.

His grace is like a perfectly pitched tuning fork sending out the clear notes of justification and peace with God. Spiritual disciplines don't teach us to create those notes ourselves; they get our hearts and minds so "in sync" with his grace that it starts "humming" into all aspects of our lives. The disciplines keep us tuned into the triumphant reality of grace we already have in Christ. As the opening words of a famous hymn say, "Come, Thou fount of ev'ry blessing, Tune my heart to sing Thy grace..." (Robert Robertson, 1758; Traditional American Melody).

³ Paul describes it as "righteousness by faith" (9:30) or "righteousness based on faith" (10:6).

⁴ See the ESV footnote for the alternate translation: "The one who by faith is righteous shall live." Both translations of verse 17b are important. The main translation emphasizes "living by faith," which leads to our sanctification. But this alternate translation reminds us that the source of our righteousness is always our faith in Christ, not our performance. So faith is both the **source** of our right relationship with God, and the **means** by which we continue to live and be sanctified.

To see how this works in real life, imagine this guy, let's call him "Alex," a university student and excellent athlete. At first, he's totally focused on the scoreboard of his life. He's a dedicated Christian, but really he's trusting in his own performance. He thinks his status with God and people are based on his "scores": his GPA, his volunteer hours, and his moral record. But every time he gets a B on a paper or misses a church meeting, his internal score drops. He feels anxious, driven, and is secretly judging others not living up to his standards. He's trying to prove a righteousness he doesn't actually have. The more he strives, the more tired and isolated he becomes. When he hits a major failure, he finally gets in tune with grace. He's injured and loses his athletic scholarship. His scoreboard soon drops to zero, and he feels worthless. Then he finally grasps the radical intervention of the gospel. He realizes God's righteousness is always a gift, already perfectly credited to him in Christ. His debt of sin is canceled, God's love for him is free and totally undeserved, and it has nothing to do with his performance. And he comes to see that Bible reading and prayer aren't ways to earn God's love, but ways to draw open the curtains of his soul to the sunshine of the grace of God in Jesus. His heart begins to resonate with the note of this grace. His life isn't easier; it's "gospelized," changed by a new, triumphant reality lived by faith. He gains Paul's obligation to the grace of Jesus to love. And this isn't a new weight on his shoulders; it's the natural resonance of a heart that finally feels safe. He doesn't love to get points; he loves because the scoreboard no longer matters. He's quieter, but a more genuinely loving, joyful person.

So, Romans 1:17 is first and foremost a declaration. It proclaims God's unveiling of his finished gift, "the righteousness of God," what he's already done for us in Christ. But verse 17, in a sense, also warns us against the performance mentality. And the quotation at the end of the verse is a powerful exhortation that challenges our entire mode of living. Keep relying only on the gift of God's grace to us in Jesus, from the moment we start our Christian life until we finish. Rigorously fight the performance mentality. Never go back to relying on our own goodness, our own strength, our own "smarts," or by our current situation.

We began today with feeling that scoreboard over our heads, maybe trying to earn righteousness in some way, which we could never gain. Romans 1:17 tells us the game's over. The pressure's off. God's own perfect righteousness, and the closest relationship with him possible, is revealed as a gift in the gospel of Jesus, and it's received entirely by faith—not from our performance, but from his grace. So let's not spend another day trying to generate our own light or play our own perfect note. Let's ask God to help us see what he's already revealing right now—his grace to us in Jesus. Let's commit to the daily disciplines of Bible reading and prayer, asking God to draw back the curtains for us to see more clearly his life-changing grace. May God help us live in sync with his grace, and day by day may he inspire us in this dark world to live only by faith in Christ.