

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.'"

Chapter 1:1-17 is the introduction to Romans. The key verse of the introduction is verse 17. This is also the key verse for the whole book of Romans. The last part of this verse, "The righteous will live by faith," is the main theme of the book of Romans, as well as the philosophy of the Christian life.

1:8-16 is Paul's [prayer for](#) the saints in Rome. In his [prayer](#) he expresses his heart's desire to go to Rome to carry out the purpose of world evangelization. It is in his prayer that he gives his personal testimony based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Several statements in his testimony were later adapted as part of the inflexible theology of Christianity. Those statements were also the power source of his personal Christian life. Let's learn what it means that "The righteous will live by faith." Most of all, let's learn Paul's great faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Paul the servant of Jesus Christ (1-4)

Look at verse 1. "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God..." Paul begins by giving his own credentials. He calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ. In Paul's time, servant meant slave. A slave is one who was once sold and bought and is no more free; he is the possession of whoever bought him. He cannot claim his own human rights. He is completely at the disposal of his master. Why does Paul describe himself in this way? It was because he was once a servant of [the Jewish](#) leaders, and more fundamentally, a servant of sin and Satan; but now he was purchased by the precious blood of Jesus, and now he belonged to Jesus Christ. Paul also says that he was "set apart for the gospel of God." Paul did not think that he became a servant of Jesus Christ by chance or fate. He accepted his servanthood as God's absolute plan for him, a plan made before he was born (Gal 1:15). He had absolute faith that he was called to be Jesus' servant by the providence of God.

Paul continues to explain whose servant he was. He was a servant of Jesus Christ, who is the King both humanly and spiritually. Verses 2-4 say, "the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 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." Here we learn several things.

First, the gospel is the gospel of God. Look at verse 2. "...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures..." The gospel was promised by God beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, the gospel is the gospel of God, and at the same time it is the gospel of Jesus. The gospel is not a story invented

by men. It was originated by God. God promised that he would send the Messiah to save men from their sins. The Bible is a record of God's continuous fulfillment of his promises and prophecies over a period of 3,000 years of history. All of his promises and prophecies were completely fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Here we learn the great faithfulness of God. Ultimately, God proved himself to be faithful by keeping his word of promise to send his one and only Son to die on the cross to save men from their sins.

But fallen men are not so faithful. Their faithfulness changes according to the situation. Louis XVI, the king of France, made a gallows, then made a decree that whoever broke a certain law would hang on the gallows. But he himself was the first one to break the law. Oliver Cromwell of England made the same kind of mistake when he took power in December 1653. These men represent man's inability to be faithful in keeping his word. Only God is faithful to his promises.

Second, Jesus Christ is the King both humanly and spiritually. Look at verse 3. "...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David." From a human point of view, Jesus was a king in the kingly line of David, for he was a descendant of David. Look at verse 4. "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." Jesus is also the spiritual King. In order to become a worldly king in the ancient world, one had to destroy the lives of others and conquer their homes and countries. But the way to become a spiritual king is different. Jesus became the spiritual King through his death and resurrection. Jesus obeyed the will of God unto death, death on the cross. When he was crucified, he lost the human battle to the evil men of the world. But on the cross he won the eternal and spiritual victory. What's more, through his resurrection Jesus Christ defeated the power of sin and Satan. Through his resurrection he gave us the eternal victory and a living hope in the kingdom of God. In this way he became our spiritual King. To Paul, Jesus was the King, both humanly and spiritually.

II. 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." In this verse Paul tells us the deeper reason why he is a servant of Jesus Christ. In verse 5 Paul tells us that he received grace and apostleship through Jesus, and for his name's sake. Here, grace means Jesus' grace of forgiveness of sin. Paul was speaking from personal experience. He was a strong man. He was a man of prominent scholarship. He was a promising young man in Jewish society. He mastered the philosophies of East and West, as well as the Law of Moses. He wanted the recognition of the world. So Paul began to persecute the church of God in order to obtain the Jewish leaders' recognition. Outwardly he appeared to be bold and successful, but inwardly he was a slave of sin; he was under the power of sin and death. He looked strong; but he was feeble and dead within himself. So he cried out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Ro 7:24) The Risen Christ met him and forgave all his sins unconditionally. After meeting the Risen Christ he could say, "By the grace of God I am what I am." (1 Co 15:10) When he said this, he really meant it. He was lost in his sins. But he was found by the precious blood of Jesus. He was a fallen man with the image

of Cain. But he was restored to the image of God. It was God's grace.

His mission from God was also restored. God made him to be a workman of God, to do good works for the glory of God. But he hadn't lived for God's glory. He had lived for his own glory. In the course of time he became a man of evil-doing. But when he received the grace of forgiveness from the Risen Christ, God's image in him was restored, and at the same time his mission was restored, too. Let's read 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."

When Paul spoke of "grace and apostleship" he did not use the singular pronoun, "I," but the plural pronoun, "we." When Paul said this, he meant that all those who received grace, received apostleship, too. God saved Paul in order to use him as his servant. Therefore, we should not take God's grace lightly or for granted. When we receive God's grace we must live for the glory of God (6).

III. Paul's prayer for the Romans (8-17)

Verses 8-16 contain Paul's prayer for the Romans. In this prayer he reveals his purpose in visiting Rome. In his prayer he emphasizes the universal need for the gospel. We learn here several things.

First, Paul's prayer. (8-10) Let's read verses 8-10. This is Paul's prayer for all the saints in Rome. In his prayer he thanked God that these Jewish immigrants in Rome had kept their faith in God. They were nothing but ugly, eagle-beaked Jewish immigrants in Rome--despised, segregated and full of worldly desires. But to Paul's eyes, they were precious. They were the seeds of the gospel of Christ Jesus, planted in the center of the world superpower, Rome. Paul had never been to Rome. He had no personal relationship with them. He was misunderstood by the bigoted and narrow-minded Jews in many ways. Despite all this, he prayed for them constantly, as a father prays for his son studying in a foreign country. As a father longs to visit his son in a foreign country, Paul reveals in his prayer that he earnestly desired to visit them. Look at verse 10. "...I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you." But he could not go to Rome as he had hoped. Look at verse 13a. "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now)...."

Second, Paul's vision. There was a clear reason why Paul was so eager to go to Rome. He wanted to obey Jesus' world mission command. He wanted to reach out to all people of all nations by means of Roman roads. Rome was the capital of the Gentile world. All roads led to Rome and from Rome roads led to all parts of the world. So Rome was a strategically important city to evangelize the whole world.

What, then, was Paul's plan to evangelize Rome and the entire world? He wanted to start with the Jewish immigrant Christians, a handful of penguins, in Rome. They were doing well to keep their personal faith. But Paul wanted to raise them as missionaries. He also wanted to convert the Jewish community into a world mission center. How? Look at verse 11. "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong." "Spiritual gift" here means

the deeper knowledge of God, and God's whole salvation plan for all men.

Verse 13b says, "...in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles." Paul definitely wanted to reach out to the Romans through the Jewish saints in Rome and raise them as Bible teachers and send them out into the whole world as missionaries. Paul's vision for Rome was God's vision. God chose him as an apostle for the Gentiles (Ac 9:15). Before his conversion, Paul had been a narrow-minded Jewish legalist; he was a man of no vision and he was a selfish man. After his conversion, however, he made God's vision his own, and he kept that vision in his heart, holding onto it with faith that prays.

Third, a sense of debt (14,15). Let's read verses 14 and 15. These verses tell us Paul's inner attitude in writing this letter to the Romans. In verse 14, "I am obligated" means "under obligation to pay taxes or debts." Debtors are considered to be "sinners" toward their creditors. They should feel a deep sense of obligation to pay off their debts. Paul had an attitude of being a debtor to all the people of the world. It was because he acknowledged that he was an eternal debtor to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to his precious children all over the world.

Fourth, the universality of the gospel (14-16). In verse 14 he said, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish." Paul states that the scope of the gospel includes people in the currents of both Hellenism and Hebraism, and the Romans as well. In other words, Paul states that all peoples of all nations are in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The necessity of the gospel is universal, and the scope of the gospel is worldwide. Here Paul also tells of the superiority of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way for all mankind to be saved from their sins and from eternal condemnation. Fifth, the gospel of Jesus is the power of God for the salvation of everyone. 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." In the times of Paul, many people were ashamed of the gospel because the gospel of Jesus was not an establishment power. They were ashamed of the gospel mainly because it concerned the teachings of a poor man of Nazareth who was condemned and crucified. But Paul was not ashamed of the gospel; rather, he was proud of the gospel because he believed that the gospel was the only power of God for salvation. This is true. No religion is clear about the way of salvation except for the gospel of Jesus. For example, nothing could change Saul into St. Paul except the power of the gospel. Nothing could change so corrupted a city as Rome into a Holy City except the power of the gospel.

Sixth, the righteous will live by faith (17). "The righteous will live by faith." In other words, Christians must live by faith alone. How on earth can this be? Impossible! There are many kinds of lifestyles in the world. Each person wants to live with his own lifestyle. Each person has his own way of living in this world or of saving himself. But Paul believed that he should live by faith because the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all people of all languages and all nations.

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 himself. God in his righteousness should have destroyed all men because of their sins. But God did not condemn men. Instead, he condemned his one and only Son on the cross. Thus he satisfied his righteousness. Also, he justified all men to be righteous before him. Through Jesus we are justified to be righteous before God, even though we are not righteous at all. Therefore, living by faith means to believe absolutely that we are saved by God's grace and that we have salvation only in Jesus. Living by faith means to live not by our own strength but by the power of Jesus. We Christians must live by faith only, from first to last. Whatever we do, we must do it by faith.

Let's read 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.'" May God bless each of us to live by faith from first to last.