

A Debt, A Desire, and A Message

Romans 1:14-17

In the verses before us, in reality, Paul brings his somewhat unique salutation and introduction of himself to the Romans to a close, and he does so in a remarkable way.

In fact, in a fashion similar to our Lord, Paul sets forth three personal “I am” statements. Those statements remind us of the “I AM” statements made by our Lord found in the Gospel according to John. It is in these three special statements that we are privileged to look deeper into the heart of a converted Jew born as Saul of Tarsus, but born again as Paul the Apostle.

“I am debtor” is how he begins in **verse 14**. Anyone who is honest and has willfully indebted himself to someone for some legitimate reason probably understands the weight of that phrase. There is no doubt that Paul was feeling the weight of personal obligation. It was an obligation that became his when Christ saved him and commissioned him to be the Apostle to the Gentile (and those of us who have been saved, it becomes our obligation too). He could very well feel the weight and pressure of duty his conversion produced in his heart to reach the lost as he spoke of “the Greek...the Barbarians; the wise,...the unwise.”

It mattered not to Paul who the sinner was or what his state or status among men was. He had a debt he owed and it was his duty to reach the lost, wherever they may be and whoever they may be. He concluded that all men needed to hear the good news of the gospel. Found within **verse 14** is a beautiful message of hope for all men. In essence, it says, the gospel is not only for the cultured and the courtly, the educated and the elite, but also for the common man or the little known man which is the kind of man who makes up the great numbers of men on planet Earth. Paul was saying I feel the pressure of duty to preach the gospel to anyone and everyone I can!

His second “I am” statement given in **verse 15** is a statement of preparedness for there he says: “I am ready to preach the gospel at Rome.” In fact, he said “for as much as is in me” he was ready to preach! This would indicate he was more than eager to take the good news of salvation to the greatest city in existence at that time. That in doing so, he would hold nothing back so that he might fulfill his felt obligation.

He knew by reputation the kind of city Rome was. He knew of the many things it boasted and bragged of. He knew of some of the opposition he would face in that great and powerful metropolis. From his statement, it seems possible that someone had tried to sow doubt in his heart as to whether or not his presence would amount to anything positive. It also seems possible that someone had tried to convince the apostle he would fail in his attempt to plant a Church in Rome simply by preaching the gospel to them. But, whatever the enemy of men's souls may have tried to do in an attempt to hamper Paul's expectations and enthusiasm, it did not work...for the enemy of Paul did not know what Paul knew. He knew the power of the gospel!

Paul knew firsthand what the gospel had done in other places like Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Colosse, Philippi, and Galatia. In fact, he knew what it had done in all places he had had the privilege to proclaim its great truths. In fact, he knew what it had done in his own life and heart! So, it was with great confidence in his heart (all that was in him) and without doubt in his mind that when he arrived at Rome, he was coming with full confidence in the message his Lord and Saviour had revealed to him and commissioned him to proclaim.

What was the message? According to **verse 16**, that message was "the gospel of Christ." It was the story that told about the death, burial, and resurrection of God's only begotten Son. It was the good news that declared: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" as found in **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**. It was the only message Paul took wherever the Spirit led him. It was the very message that was proclaimed to "the Jew first and also to the Greek (Gentile)."

If that were not enough in itself, Paul continued to tell them at Rome (and us), that the gospel was "the power of God unto salvation." It is true that Rome knew power, militarily and politically speaking. Rome knew the kind of power that could be produced by men and how that power could then be forced onto men against their will. But Rome knew nothing of the power contained in the message the apostle brought to Rome. And the message that Paul brought was the "gospel of Christ" which, according to Paul, is the power of Almighty God.

Please notice Paul did not say the gospel contained the power of God, he said "***it is the power of God unto salvation***" (emphasis mine). The word "power" comes from the Greek word "*dunamis*." It is from that word that we get our words

dynamite, dynamic, dynamo. Most all of us are familiar with those three words. Most all of us know they speak of some degree of power. Most all of know power can either be a constructive thing or a destructive thing depending on who is using it and how it is being used.

The message of the gospel is both destructive and constructive. It is destructive in that it tears down the resistance of a sinner's hard and impotent heart: the kind of heart that resides in those who are depraved in mind, body, and soul and which are headed for a devil's hell and a Christ-less eternity. But, it is not until the gospel does its destructive work that it is able to do its constructive work. I think it is somewhat amazing that at the same time it works to destroy all that sin has done in the old man to separate man from God, it works to turn an old man into a "new creature in Christ" as it says in (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). And by that action, it makes him a fit subject for the kingdom of God. There is no power in all the world that compares with the power of the gospel!

May I say here that it is no wonder the great apostle cried: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation."

According to **1 Corinthians 15:3** the message of the gospel is the primary message of the Church, meaning it is the message of greatest importance. When Paul wrote that statement, he was not speaking only of the Church in Corinth, but of the Church in general. In fact, in **1 Corinthians 2:1-5** we find Paul revealing the plan he had when he came to the pagan and wicked city of Corinth. The only message he knew would work and the only message that he determined to proclaim was the message of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." He knew that neither his wit nor his wisdom would suffice to break through the stronghold of sin and Satan that existed in that great worldly and wicked city. He knew it would take a power unknown by this world, but a power needed in this world. He knew it would take the power of the gospel.

The power of the gospel is not a power possessed by man and used by which he may altar the shape of either steel or stone. The power of the gospel lies in the message that makes up the gospel and that is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Can that statement be true? According to the record found in **Acts 10** not only can be true but is seen to be true! It is in **Acts 10** that we find the Peter the apostle using the keys of the kingdom for the second time in order to unlock the door of salvation to the Gentile world. For the record given by Luke in that

chapter says that: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on them all which *heard the word*” (emphasis mine) **Acts 10:44**.

The words Peter spake were specific words. They were words that were inherent with the power of God in them. They were the words of salvation by grace. It was a message decided on in eternity past and brought into a world of lost sinners concerning the very Son of God Himself. As mentioned above, it was the very foundational message Jesus commissioned His “chosen” to use. In fact, the message of the gospel of Christ is the very message on which He builds His Church. It was the message that did not only have the power of God on it (which would have been enough), but it also had the power of God in it! In fact, the gospel was, is, and always will be “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

It was the message Paul proclaimed without reservation. It was the message in which he declared: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” He knew it was not an exclusive message, but was, rather, an inclusive message. Meaning that, it was not reserved for just a select few (as the hyper-Calvinists believe and teach), but is preserved for the “whosoever will(s)” of this world. For all those who will simply believe the message of the gospel. In fact, it is a message for all men because all men need to be saved!

The apostle said it is: “to *everyone* (emphasis mine) that believeth.” The only condition placed upon the gospel in order for men to be saved is that they believe. If God added any other condition to the gospel, then it would not be for everyone. All God requires for men, women, boys, and girls to be saved is something they all can do, and that is to believe that God sent His Son into this world to save sinners. Remember: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” **John 3:16**. He also said in **Romans 10:9** “(That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.)” And in **Romans 10:13** we find: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.”

Paul goes on to state, lest there be any question from anyone, that the gospel is for “the Jew first, (they were the first to hear this marvelous message; see **Acts 2**) and also to the Greek.” The word “Greek” found here is understood to mean all who are not Jewish or those who are Gentile. From the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in

Acts 2, until **chapter ten** of **Acts**, the Church was all but totally Jewish if not totally Jewish. But, in **Acts 10**, the gospel was proclaimed by Peter in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea Maritime, a Roman Centurion, and thus, the door of salvation was opened to the Gentile world. In this we can see and more clearly understand the meaning of Paul's statement when he said the gospel was "to the Jew first."

With **verse 17** Paul actually brings his unique salutation to a close and at the same time introduces the theme of the Book of Romans. It is my humble opinion that the theme of this great book is "the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." It was said by Alva McClain that "the sixteenth verse should never be read apart from the seventeenth. God hath joined those two verses together..." and he seems to be right. The reason being, within the gospel that Paul addresses in **verse 16**, we find there is a special revelation. It is a revelation about the righteousness of God! It is the righteousness man needs (but cannot produce on his own) in order to be just before God. It is the righteousness that God is willing to put on the account of any and all sinners who are willing to take it as offered. And, that is, by faith or by simply believing in the work Christ accomplished at Calvary. It is the righteousness of God which is from God that every man needs and can have, again, if they simply receive it by faith.

So, in this verse we find the theme of the Book of Romans and, as said above, the theme is "the righteousness of God." In one of its many forms, righteousness is used in the Book of Romans at least thirty three times. The righteousness of God is illustrated in the fact that Christ died as the sinners substitute, and while suspended between the heavens and the Earth, according to **Isaiah 53:6**, we learn that while he was suspended between the heavens and the Earth: "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." That means God allowed His unique one of a kind Son to die in the place of sinners, to be buried, and to be raised out from among the dead in order to preserve God's holiness while at the same time allowing God to forgive the sinner of his sins. It enables God to be both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" **Romans 3:26**.

Please allow me to give you my definition of the righteousness of God. It may not be the best definition available, but it helps me grasp this great subject that meant for us to understand: "God, being what He is (holy), is bound to do what His nature demands, that is, all things right or righteous whether in relationship to His person, His laws, or His creation."

Once again, the message of the gospel reveals that salvation is solely by faith plus nothing: nothing more than faith and nothing less than faith. It is not of works but faith in the finished work Christ accomplished at Calvary and, again, nothing more. In the Old Testament man discovered he could not meet the righteous demands God established by keeping the law. In fact, in the first three chapters of Romans, we find God brings all of mankind (the heathen, the hypocrite, and the Hebrew) into His courtroom and then declares that: “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” **Romans 3:23**.

So, as Paul says in **verse 17** “the just shall live by faith,” we learn it is so important, that the Holy Spirit inspired holy men to record that great phrase no less than four times in the Bible. It first appears in **Habakkuk 2:4** and reads: “the just shall live by faith.” And in the other places where we find this great truth repeated, it becomes apparent that God intentionally placed it in specific places and, through study, we learn why He has. We learn He did so in order to highlight and emphasize each word that makes up this amazing phrase.

This becomes apparent when one understands the context of the passage where the phrase is found. For instance, as it appears here in **Romans 1:17**, we can easily understand that the word “just” is the word to be emphasized. After all it is a passage found in a book whose very theme is the righteousness of God. We find the phrase repeated the second time in **Galatians 3:11** where we understand the emphasis it placed upon the word “live.” Finally, the phrase is used once again in **Hebrews 10:38**, where we understand the word “faith” is to be emphasized in this context. In fact, it is used to introduce the main subject of **Hebrews 11** which, as we all know, is faith.

Allow me to make one small but significant comment on the phrase “from faith to faith” found in **verse 17**. For years I wondered what the writer was trying to communicate in that phrase. Then one day, the Lord allowed me to see its simplicity and yet its sublimity. It simply means that a person who is saved by faith is to then live by faith. That is both simple and profound.

Before I bring our section of the study to a close, please allow me to lift up an important truth God has set before us for our consideration. What is that truth? It is the truth that God has set forth a pattern which He always follows when dealing with sinful men. Before He brings His judgment against men and before He reveals His wrath against the sins of the lost, He warns them of the certainty of

judgment and how they may escape the judgment God has planned for them. In light of the fact that God always knows our needs, we learn He always finds a way to meet those needs by His grace. In order to highlight this truth, I once again quote from Alva McClain. Listen once again as he says so eloquently: “We are not to know anything about the wrath of God which is against us until we know about the righteousness of God which is for us.”

In our next study, we will learn how the wrath of God is revealed from heaven and what the worst thing God can do in judging man is and which He has done in order to bring judgment upon those who have rejected his warnings and his gracious offer of righteousness.

And we will learn that He judges because He is righteous.

Just as a little supplemental information before I close this chapter, I leave these thoughts on righteousness with desire they prove somewhat helpful in your personal study and consideration of righteousness.

1. Righteousness is behavior that is both morally and justifiably right.
2. God is just, meaning He is always right in what He does: He is never partial or prejudiced.
3. God’s righteousness is the natural expression of His holiness. He is infinitely pure and opposed to all sin.
4. God is not defined by the word righteous: the word righteous is defined by God.
5. God is not measured by a standard of righteousness: God is the standard of righteousness.
6. Although profound, a simple idea contained in the righteousness of God is the idea that God always does what is right. It is a quality inherent in His nature.
7. Simple definition of righteousness: being morally right, acting in accord with divine and moral law, free from guilt or sin

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