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Last time we studied the opening verses of Romans. In verses 9-15, Paul tells the Roman believers that he is praying for them constantly, he loves them and longs to see them, and that he is obligated (to God and to them) to share the gospel with them and is eager to do so.

Verses 16 and 17 are central to the theme of the letter. Why can Paul (and we) be bold rather than ashamed when it comes to our faith and presentation of the gospel? It tells how God by His power saves all who believe in His Son (not just 'about' His Son – even the demons do that). This power is extended equally to all.

The righteousness of God describes that characteristic of God by which He always does what is right. He is always righteous; there is no flaw, wrong, dishonesty, unfairness or injustice in Him.

The righteousness of God also means that His method of justifying ungodly sinners is righteous. This is so because Christ has served as the sinless substitute to pay our debt ("the wages of sin is death" – Romans 6:23, and "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" – Hebrews 9:22). The Son of God Himself has satisfied all the demands of divine justice.

Thirdly, the righteousness of God refers to the perfect standing that God provides for those who believe in His Son (2 Corinthians 5:21). When God "justifies" us, it is a judicial act by the Sovereign Lord and Judge of the universe by which He declares us to be righteous in standing although we are far from perfect in practice! For those that are "in Christ", God sees us in Christ's perfection. His righteousness is imputed to our account. We will study that in detail, particularly in chapter 5.

The gospel is a revelation of the righteousness of God. It tells us that God's righteousness demands that sins must be punished. God cannot be consistent with His own perfect standard of holiness and just 'sweep sins under the rug', ignore them or condone them.

The expression "the just (righteous) shall live by faith is first stated in the OT and repeated three more times in the NT. It can be understood to mean "the 'justified by faith' ones shall live. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

The gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be properly understood without proper understanding of man's sinfulness and God's righteousness. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), not those who profess to be righteous in themselves.

One must first recognize that he is a sinner before he can understand his need for a savior. One must choose between man's (broad) way or God's (narrow) way. In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ says, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14)

It takes humility to admit that we are sinners and utterly dependent on someone else to save us. It is not our normal human nature, which makes the way "hard" in that sense. But, it is not hard as far as difficulty, or requiring special talents or credentials.

In Matthew 18, the prideful disciples are arguing about who will be the greatest in Heaven. To teach them, Christ placed a child in their midst and said, "whoever humbles himself like this child will be the greatest in Heaven" (Matt. 18:4).

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. (1 Peter 5:6).

The remainder of the chapter speaks of God's wrath on unrighteousness. People need the gospel because they are lost without it. God makes it very clear that no one will have any legitimate excuses before Him. The extended section from Romans 1:18 to 3:20 details how everyone in the whole world is guilty before God and in need of His grace.

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- 1) How do our actions demonstrate that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ?
- 2) Do we tend to measure our own righteousness by man's standard or by God's standard?
- 3) How has God provided a way by which we can satisfy His perfect standard of righteousness?

Romans 1 (continued)

The Just Live by Faith

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

¹⁷For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed through faith that leads to more faith. As it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

God’s Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

¹⁹For what may be known of God is manifested in them, because God has shown it to them.

²⁰For His invisible attributes, including His eternal power and His divine nature, have been clearly seen ever since the creation of the world, being understood through the things that have been made.

So men are without excuse, ²¹for although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, or give thanks to Him, but they became vain in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images made like corruptible man, and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

²⁷Likewise the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another.

Men committed shameful, indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

²⁸And furthermore, since they did not want to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do things that are not fitting and right.

²⁹Being filled with all manner of unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, and malice; and being full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and evil-mindedness; they are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boastful, inventors of evil ways, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³²and although they know God’s righteous judgment that those who practice such things are deserving of death, they not only do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Memory Verse for the Week

Romans 1:16 (a) – For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

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