



**Welcome to Faith**

# **The Letter of Paul to the Romans**

**Romans 1:8-32**

# Review

## Romans: Four Major Interpretations

- I. Justification by Faith
- II. The Two Ages
- III. Paul's Defense of His Ministry
- IV. God is righteous - to the Jew first and now also to the Gentile.

## Review: Already-Not Yet

Gregory of Nissa explains the paradox of the already-not yet with the example of a snake. Cut off the head of the snake and the snake will live for a short time but eventually the snake will die. So death has been amputated (by Christ's death and resurrection); yet death still has a life of its own and will, with the coming of the Kingdom of God, be vanquished.

## Romans 1:8-10 Thanksgiving

<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. <sup>9</sup> For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, <sup>10</sup> asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

### **v. 8 - "First I thank my God ..."**

In Greek letters, immediately following the salutation, the writer offered a prayer to his/her god on the recipients' behalf asking for good health and prosperity for them. Paul is not concerned with health and wealth but is concerned about faith.

**"... because your faith is proclaimed in all the world."**

## Romans 1:11-15 Paul's Upcoming Visit

<sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you,  
<sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.  
<sup>13</sup> I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: <sup>15</sup> so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

**v. 14 - "I am under obligation both to the Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish."**

Romans considered themselves culturally Greeks.

Greek = cultured/wise

barbarian = non-Greek, non-cultured, ignorant.

In the Greek language, the word "barbarian" (which begins with a brrbrr sound) sounds like gibberish.

## Romans 1:16-17

### The Heart of the Gospel

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the **power** of God for salvation to **every one who has faith**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

**"I know I shall not be put to shame, because the one who proves me right is near." - Isaiah 50:7-8**

### Romans 1:16

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel:** it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**"For I am not ashamed of the gospel ..."** because the gospel is what it is. The Gospel belongs to God, not to me or to anyone else; it is divinely appointed, therefore I preach it without being ashamed, self-conscious, embarrassed, conflicted.

## Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

**" ... to the Jew first and also to the Greek..."**

(Meaning of also is "then" - first to the Jew, then to the Greek.)

Everyone is damned! Everyone lives under sin. The Jews were/are condemned first under the law. Yet, because of God's grace (not because of anything that we have done or anything that we can do or will do) anyone who accepts what God has done in Christ (faith) has a new and saving relationship with God.

## The Power of God

The same God who is the only one powerful enough to create the universe is also the God who has power to save the creation, including created humanity.

Greek word for power (dynamis) finds a cognate in the English "dynamite" - helpful to think of the gospel as God's explosive world-changing power.

## The One who has Come-to-Faith

Paul uses the Greek verb "pisteuo" and the noun "**pistis**" (which is translated as *faith*, *faithfulness*, *belief*, or *trust* in English) and the adjective "**pistos**" (which translates as *faithful*, *believing*, *trusting*, or *trustworthy*) to describe our relationship with God.

English lacks a verb "to faith," but that is what happens when we "come to God." **God is revealing God's own covenant faithfulness, through the gospel, which is the world-changing event of God's power for salvation, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** We must behold, seize, come to this truth.

## Martin Luther on Romans 1:16-17

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression '**the righteousness of God**,' because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous ... Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning."

## John Wesley on Romans' effect on him

From his journal: John Wesley "went unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins away, even **mine**; and saved me from the law of sin and death."

## Righteousness - Paul uses term 34 times!

Romans 1:17 - "... **the righteousness of God** is revealed through faith ... as it is written 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'"

In Judaism, righteousness is conformity to God's will/law.

For Paul, it is **not an ethical term but a relational term** - the righteous person has received God's acquittal. God does for us what we can not do for ourselves.

## Righteousness and the Already - Not Yet

Salvation (being justified, being made righteous, being saved) is a **future reality** ... but it begins in the **present**.

Faith is believing obedience.

We believe in our acquittal - to have faith is to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ not as a slave but as an adopted child to fully receive the benefits of adoption.

## Enlightenment - The Age of Reason

### **Enlightenment**

- away from superstition.
- freedom of thought.
- faith must be rational, common sense.
- away from the power of the church.

What is rational?

What makes sense?

## **Frederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)**

- father of modern theology,
- father of liberalism,
- re-cast Christianity in light of reason

Jesus is the ethical and moral teacher

**key is ethics, not metaphysics**

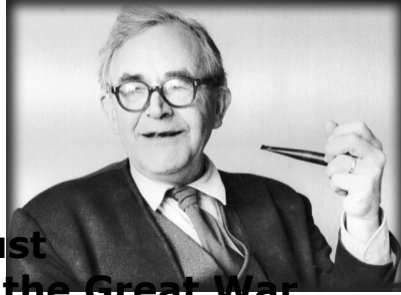
**The Golden Rule Rules!**

## **Christian Liberalism**

**Liberalism became dominant in the 19th and early 20th century Protestantism**

- Catholicism seen as anti-enlightenment.
- European socialism seen as "extension of Christ's teaching;" some argued the same for Marxism.

**Karl Barth** - as a young theologian/pastor, fell under the spell of "liberal theology" (and politically became a socialist). But, **everything changed for Barth in August 1914 and the outbreak of the Great War.**



Liberals saw the war as an extension of Germany's mission in the world to bring rationality/enlightenment; spoke of *Christian Europe, God was on their side*. Barth saw a "hopeless confusion" between Christianity and nationalism.

## Is Man Perfectable?

**Crisis Theology** - to read the Bible and let the Bible speak, allow the Bible to challenge, change, "reform" us. Rather than clinging to old notions (Germany as divine state), we are "reformed and always reforming by the power of God's word."

Liberalism assumes man's perfectibility, that things are getting better, that knowledge is the key; the more we know, the more ignorance is removed, the better we will become. So how to explain the Holocaust in the most sophisticated nation (Germany) in the world?

## Neo-Orthodoxy as Alternative to Liberalism

Barth was to be the major player in 20th Century Theology and led a movement called neo-orthodoxy (the alternative to liberalism was not fundamentalism, but a new way of casting traditional faith/biblical Christianity) led by Barth's focus on Romans.

### Karl Barth Rediscovered Romans

Different approach to Romans 1:17 - the subject of Romans is not man but God. It is a story of God's righteousness - in Romans, God's true self/character is revealed (**God is just**, always was and always will be).

"For Barth, the letter is not about how humans reach God by deciding to trust in Christ or God; the letter is rather about how God, who is totally outside the realm of history as we know it, is completely consistent with himself and who, while being faithful, encounters humanity."

Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle*

Barth published his **Commentary on Romans** in 1919 - *bombshell* - Christianity has not been the same since.

## Romans 1:18-32 - God's Judgment on Sin

### Summary

Paul argues that we are **without excuse** if we do not believe in God ... even if we have not heard the Gospel we should be able to see/deduce God's handiwork in nature and know that there is a higher power, a higher force, a God (whom the Jews named Yahweh and who Jesus revealed as Abba, Father God).

Realizing that there is something (someONE) else, however, is not enough. It is not enough to **know** that there is a God; men and women must **honor** God or their minds darken, and they turn to various idolatries and become sinful.

## The Wrath of God - Romans 1:18-23

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. **So they are without excuse;** <sup>21</sup> for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

## v. 18 - "For the wrath of God is revealed ..."

**Wrath** - The wrath of God is not hate or anger, it is judgment. Paul believes that God's judgment is active until evil is finally put down.

Wrath is not opposed to God's love. Wrath is not malicious or capricious, not meant to hurt or destroy, but always an aspect of God's love.

Analogy: Parents discipline their child because they love their child (although the child may see it as punishment - a loving parent always uses discipline in a restorative way - not to destroy, but to build up).

## Wrath and the Already - Not Yet

**Wrath belongs to the LAST DAY (Romans 2:16** - "on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus"). Wrath is already here (it is experienced as God's discipline to those whom God has called), but wrath is not yet - wrath is to be experienced in the Day of the Lord/The Last Day/The Judgment.

Point of theological difference: some believe that in the Last Judgment, God will discipline and not punish ... this leads to a Universalism.

## They (We) Are Without Excuse

v. 19-20 - how can you hold the Gentiles accountable to the Gospel if they have never heard the Gospel, if they have never heard the truth of God?

*Natural Law:* Romans 1:20 - Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

We are without excuse - **from nature**. Many contemporary observers would also say **from existence**. Existentialism is to see our plight. Without God we are alone, abandoned and without purpose or meaning. What is life if there is no telos (no end, no purpose, no reason for it?).

## Problem of Natural Law

Modern commentators point out that there are serious limitations about what can be known about God from revelation:

- Would we know about grace?
- Would we know the essential character of God?

## Honor God

Romans 1:21 - for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.

Failure of the Greek world was not that they denied God (or gods) but that they did not honor God, did not worship God. We are never so alive and so human as when we worship God. We were created to worship God (Westminster Confession - "the chief end of man is to honor and glorify God forever ...").

Thus, we are all without excuse and stand in judgment. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

## God Gave Them Up - Distorted Sexuality Romans 1:24-27

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. <sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, <sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

## Sinful Desires

### **v. 24 - "... the lusts of their hearts ..."**

Greek defined **sinful desires** as "the passionate desire for forbidden pleasure."

**v. 24-27 distorted sexuality** - Greek and Roman writers corroborate Paul's definition; it was an age of unparalleled immorality. There wasn't an itch that did not get scratched.

### **A question and a response:**

**Question:** Does Paul assume that all sexuality is naturally heterosexual, therefore to be sexually attracted to a member of the same sex is unnatural and any sexual involvement immoral? But what if some people are created by God such that they find it 'natural' to be same-sex attracted; is their sexuality deviant/dishonorable, perverted or must they live out the same sexual ethics as mandated to those who are opposite-sex attracted?

**Response:** Coming this spring, at Tuesdays Together, a 4-week discussion of homosexuality that will study these and other Biblical texts.

## Can We Be Good Without God? Romans 1:28-32

<sup>28</sup> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. <sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

<sup>32</sup> Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.

# Can we be good without God?

## Summary

### Romans Chapters 1-3 - A Story within a Story

1. Human unrighteousness and unfaithfulness cannot undo God's righteousness.
2. Two-part story of world gone wrong.
  - Part 1* - applicable to all (Jews and Gentiles) - we all descend from Adam and Eve.
  - Part 2* - the particular story of Israel who is meant to be God's "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6) but who in fact is "living in darkness" (Isaiah 49:6).
3. God's merciful rescue operation for the lost world (both humanity and Israel) - the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only way salvation could work.