

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Romans 3:21-8:39

The Revelation of the Gospel

In Paul's Introduction we see something of a thesis statement for the book of Romans where he writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." --Romans 1:16-17

One of the most important things to know is that the Gospel (or Good News) is a **revelation**. That means that the message of the Gospel is not something that Paul is making up, rather it is a message that God is giving to the people of the world through the apostle. Over the course of his letter, Paul will systematically work through the major themes of this thesis statement.

First, he establishes the universal human need for salvation from the just judgment of a Holy, Holy, Holy God. Every person on this planet desperately needs the message of salvation held out in the Gospel. This is why Paul is not ashamed to bring this message. This was covered in the first 3 chapters.

Topic	Passage
Introduction to the Revelation of the Gospel	1:1 - 1:17
The Revelation of the Justice of God	1:18 - 3:20
The Revelation of the Grace of God	3:21 - 8:39
The Revelation of the Plan of God	9:1 - 11:36
The Revelation of the Will of God	12:1 - 15:13
Concluding Greetings and Benedictions	15:14 - 16:27

The Literary Structure of Romans

Having laid the ground work and basis for human need for salvation, Paul will expand on how God has revealed his salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul calls this salvation "righteousness" or "justification", and it is a gift offered to all humanity. He will explain that the way a person receives this

righteousness is by responding in what he calls “the obedience of faith” in Jesus. In chapters 3-8, Paul will explain how this righteousness works and is appropriated in our lives through belief, or faith in the revelation of the grace of God.

The Revelation of the Grace of God (3:21-8:39)

If Chapters 1-3 were about the revelation of God’s wrath and judgment due to human sin, chapters 3:21-8:39 are about God revelation of grace and righteousness through Jesus Christ.

The structure of this section breaks into four parts:

1. God’s righteousness revealed and examined (3:21-4:25)
2. God’s People United with Christ (5:1-6:23)
3. God’s Law and Christian Discipleship (7:1-25)
4. God’s Spirit in God’s Children. (8:1-39)

God’s righteousness revealed and examined (3:21-4:25)

If the first three chapters reveal humanity’s problem; the next five chapters reveal the Good News of God’s solution:

Romans 1:18 began: “The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven...”

Romans 3:21 begins: “But Now, the righteousness of God has been manifested...”

The words “But Now” indicates a major turning point in Paul’s presentation. He concluded the last section with a withering indictment of all of humanity. “None is righteous, no, not one.” But that is a dilemma which God has overcome through sending his son:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. –Romans 3 21-25a

Paul explains that the righteousness of God will not come from sinful humanity following the law but by a gift of gracious forgiveness and redemption through the Cross of Jesus Christ. As he will explain, a gift is not earned as some type of compensation but rather is accepted and received through faith in Jesus.

Immediately, he anticipates that there will be intellectual objections to this idea. The first, it that such a scheme eliminates a person’s ability self-confidently boast in their own “self-righteousness”. Paul agrees, there is no longer any room to boast in self. Because righteousness is a gift given and not a reward earned, the person who receives this gift has no grounds to boast in it. (3:27-31)

Paul anticipates that this way of considering righteousness would make a pious Jew a little un-easy. He rhetorically asks, “What then shall we say was gained by our father Abraham according to the flesh?” (4:1) This clearly a reference to the covenant sign of circumcision. Paul then uses Abraham as the primary illustration that even Abraham did not receive righteousness because of his obedience to the commandment to be circumcised, but rather for his belief in “him who justifies the ungodly.”(4:4) He believed God, “and it was credited to him as righteousness.”(4:3) Indeed, he says, if Abraham got what was due to him with regards to the law, it would be judgment.

*“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” –Romans 4:7-8*

Paul argues then that Abraham becomes the model and father of all who share his faith in the God who “gives life to the dead and calls into existence to existence the things that do not exist.” (4:17).

Those who would share in Abraham’s faith are called to believe in “him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Theologians refer to the “imputation” of righteousness. Essentially, that means that the righteousness of God is “credited to us” even though we do not deserve it—it is a gift to any and all who believe in Jesus. The implication of this God given righteousness is life changing as we come to be united with Christ!

God’s People United with Christ (5:1-6:23)

Now Paul turns from explaining how the Gospel works and is appropriated by faith to a description of the benefits of being given this righteousness. In verses 5:1-11, Paul tells of six marvelous results of being made righteous or justified by faith in Christ. Each assertion of benefit begins with a “we”. “We have peace with God” (1). We are standing in his grace (2a). “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (2b). “We rejoice in our sufferings...” (3-8). We shall be saved through Christ (9-10). We also rejoice in our reconciliation to God (11).

Paul then compares two humanities: one in Adam and one in Christ. We are all born into Adam and in him die, those who believe in Jesus are given new life—eternal life. (5:12-21)

In chapter 6 describes the actual change that will take place in our lives through the transference into Unity with Jesus Christ. Paul uses the metaphor of Jesus’ physical cross and resurrection to describe the spiritual death and resurrection that occurs in the life of a believer. The sin nature is put to death, we are given a new resurrection nature in Jesus Christ. This concept is difficult to describe. So Paul uses another metaphor—slavery and freedom.

Our human nature and wills are enslaved to sin, however Jesus is in a process of liberating us from our sin nature through a process of renewal and inner transformation called “sanctification”.

God's Law and Christian Discipleship (7:1-25)

The process of sanctification is not accomplished through external means to us such as commandments and laws, but rather internal renewal through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul discusses in chapter 7, the effects of the external commandments of God on a person controlled by the sinful nature. Even though God's commandments are right and good, they actually accomplish death in our lives. What the believer has that the law cannot accomplish is the inward liberating power of the Holy Spirit.

God's Spirit in God's Children. (8:1-39)

The final chapter of this section, Paul explores how the Holy Spirit liberates the sinful will from the power of the sin nature. (8:1-11) He then describes the benefits of the Spirit in the tremendous internal assurance of Sonship rather than the condemnation and guilt that came from the slavery to the Sin nature under the Law.

He describes the work of the Spirit as a process of interaction and transformation in accordance with the divine purposes and will of God. Those who have the Spirit of God can be assured of absolute security and goodness in their relationship and love from God.