

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 1:13-17 - Speaker Notes



Background

Last time we were together, we saw in Romans chapter one that there are four things that all believers have in common. We are all called by God to be His children, we are all sanctified, that is, we are set-apart for God's use, we are all called to pray, and we are all called to encourage one another. The great creator God has chosen us to be His adopted children. Think about this for a moment. What an amazing honor! God chose you and me to be his sons. Remember ladies, that's not a gender issue. Not all adopted children were entitled to inherit from their father. Only adopted sons could inherit. Not only did He choose us, but He also has set us apart from the rest of the world, a world controlled by sin. Here's how it is expressed by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (Ephesians 1:3-5)

Did you catch that? "He chose us ... that we would be holy and blameless before Him ..." Because we have been chosen, one day we will stand before Him. But - we won't stand before him in our own righteousness, or total lack thereof. It says that we will be holy and blameless (that means we will be as sinless and as righteous as Jesus Christ.) Part of our calling is our sanctification, He set us apart for His service. And – because we have been set-apart for God's service, we should be even more motivated to do what He has called us to do.

There are actually two types of sanctification that apply to all Christians. There is what theologians call "Positional Sanctification." That is the righteousness that we have as a result of God's decree. He has declared us to be righteous, without sin. Then, there is what

theologians call “Progressive Sanctification.” This refers to our growth as Christians as we walk down the road of life with God by our side, teaching us and helping us to grow in our faith. And, as we grow in our faith we become more and more set-apart from the world and more and more set-apart to serve Him.

Over the past few months, I have stressed over and over the importance of reading the Bible daily, but Paul wants us to move beyond just reading. We should also be praying throughout the day, and we should constantly go out of our way to encourage each other. Part of our ongoing faith walk with God involves including Him in every aspect of our lives.

Now, let’s see what else Paul had to say in this very personal letter to the Christians in Rome.

Romans 1:13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may have some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

I really enjoy the tenderness that Paul shows toward other believers. He could easily have started off this verse with, “You, brothers and sisters, are ignorant! You’re ignorant of the fact that I have often intended to come visit you ...” but in such matters he is much kinder. He says, “I do not want you to be unaware.” The implication is very clear, they were unaware, and he didn’t want that to be the case.

Paul had wanted to visit Rome for some time, and apparently had made plans to do so on numerous occasions, but he had been prevented from doing so. We don’t know specifically what hindered Paul. It is likely that it simply wasn’t God’s timing.

His reason for wanting to be with the Roman Christians, as we said earlier, was to share a gift of spiritual value, a message of strengthening and encouragement. Here, he elaborates a little more on his reason for wanting to come, “**that I may have some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.**” Paul was not looking to share a plate of dried figs with them, that’s not the type of fruit that he is talking about. He’s talking about the fruit of the Spirit that comes about as a result of the Spirit of God working in people’s hearts.

You will notice that Paul’s objective was to do that which would ultimately bring praise to God, not what would ultimately bring praise to Paul. This Paul is dramatically different from the former Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted Christians for personal gain and because of personal zeal. He is still a zealot, but now that zeal is focused on the work of God rather than on the work of Paul.

Romans 1:14-15

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. In this way, for my part, I am eager to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

The expression, “I am under obligation ...”, could also be translated as, “I am indebted to ...” This is an interesting verse from the apostle Paul. On the surface it appears that he is saying that he is under obligation, or owes a debt, to a number of people, but I don’t think that’s what he means. Paul was called by God specifically to be the apostle to the Gentiles, that is, to non-Jews. We see this later in Romans:

For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, (Romans 11:13)

In fact, Paul did not have an option as to whether or not he was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He was compelled to do so by God. He owed it to God because of what God had done for him (salvation) and because he was called by God to do it.

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16)

That’s why Paul says that he is obligated as a debtor. He felt like he owed a great debt to God, and it was only by being obedient to God’s call that he could pay off that debt. He expresses that debt in terms of people because it was to people that he was compelled to preach.

In fact, Paul says that he was “under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,” but what does he mean? We have to remember that when Rome conquered any land, those who were conquered were permitted to retain their local language, but they were also required to use the common language of the Empire. This common language was Greek. Therefore, anyone who spoke Greek was considered civilized. Anyone who did not speak Greek sounded like someone uttering, “bar, bar, bar ...” Thus, they were called barbarians.

Paul then expresses these two classes of people in another manner as further explanation, “to wise and unwise.” A literal translation of this phrase would be “to the wise and the unintelligent.” I think he makes this distinction so as to be clear that he is not talking about a political difference, but a social difference. He wants to show that he is not bound or prohibited to preach to people based on social class or nationality, because the gospel is to all people everywhere.

Paul felt a strong constraint on himself to do what God had called him to do. He felt a deep-seated conviction that he was called to preach. He also clearly believed that all who are saved are called to serve. Paul goes into much more detail about this notion in Romans chapter eight.

Not only did Paul feel compelled to preach the Gospel to the Greeks and the barbarians, now he is saying that he is also ready to preach the good news to the people in Rome. Paul was completely submitted to God and committed to whatever God wanted him to do! Keep in mind that this was written during the reign of Nero, who hated Christians. Yet Paul was willing to risk his life to proclaim the gospel message in this Christian hating environment.

Romans 1:16-17

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 to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH.”

Paul has been talking quite personally to the Roman Christians about his desire to see them and to give them a gift of great spiritual value. He has just told them that he is under debt to God to preach the gospel to all people. He now makes a subtle, albeit significant, turn in his message from one of introduction and consolation to one of open proclamation. Paul is just starting his sermon. Let’s listen carefully!

He says he had not brought any shame on himself by preaching the good news of Jesus. But why would anyone consider him to have been ashamed? Think about this: the Jews had chased Paul away, regarding him as an apostate. And by the wise among the Gentiles he had been persecuted, despised, and driven from place to place, regarded as the filth of the world. He had every reason to feel personally ashamed. Nonetheless, he was not ashamed of the gospel.

Why was Paul so confident in his stand on the gospel? Because as he says here, “**it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.**” The power in the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ died to pay the price for your sins and mine, is the power of God Himself. God, who demands absolute righteousness from each of us, cannot accept us into His presence if our righteousness is any less than perfect. Since none of us is righteous in and of ourselves (**Romans 3:10**), we are condemned to eternal separation from God. Belief in the gospel, however, results in God crediting us with His own righteousness. Therefore, the gospel truly **IS** the power of God resulting in salvation to everyone who believes! Praise be to God!

Paul then goes on to say that this salvation was offered to the Jews first and then to the rest of the world, who Paul refers to as Greeks. If you carefully read the book of Acts, you will see that Peter and the other apostles focused their preaching entirely on the Jews, and Paul’s early ministry was to Jews. In whatever city he entered, Paul went first into the synagogues to deliver the gospel message to the Jews there. Then, as we read the 13th chapter of Acts, we find Paul and Barnabas in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch where they were asked to speak. There, they boldly proclaimed the good news about Jesus and encouraged the people to believe.

The message was so well received that the following week, Paul and Barnabas returned to the synagogue and found a large gathering of people who wanted to hear the gospel message. However, in verse 45 we read,

...when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, ... (**Acts 13:45**)

Then, here’s how Paul and Barnabas responded to the Jews:

... It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. (**Acts 13:46**)

So, the gospel truly was preached “**to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.**” Here in his letter to the Romans, Paul goes on to proclaim, “**For in it the righteousness of God is revealed**

from faith to faith ...” What Paul is saying is that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel first of all as the result of faith. That is, we are declared righteous when we believe the gospel message, just as Abraham was declared righteous when he believed God regarding His promise (see [Genesis 15:6](#)). We also see here that righteousness is revealed from, or as a result of, faith. Paul is saying is that this righteousness, which God has now given us, is also revealed when we live by faith - after we have been saved. That is, righteousness is revealed resulting in a demonstration of faith. One way of putting it is to say that the righteousness of God is revealed in saving faith, which then produces righteousness in the form of a daily living faith.

By way of firmly reinforcing what he means (that the righteousness that God gives us results in daily living faith), Paul then says, “as it is written, ‘[The just shall live by faith.](#)’” This is a quote taken from [Habakkuk 2:4](#). Both the Septuagint translation of this passage in Habakkuk and the original Hebrew carry the meaning, “the righteous person shall live by his confident faith in God.”

So What?

Are you a zealot today? Paul’s zeal led him to visit Rome. He had made plans, but they were thwarted time and time again. If we were in his sandals, we might be thinking that our adversary was working against us. Paul doesn’t indicate what he thought was preventing him from making the trip, but neither did he give up trying. He was totally committed to going to Rome.

Is there something that you are so totally committed to that you place it above other things in your life? If so, what is it? Is it your children? Is it your job or your business? Is it your husband or your wife? Is it your health? Is it your retirement? These are all good things to be zealous about, but they are all the wrong things if you’re not first zealous about serving God - and doing so His way.

Do you know what God has called you to do? If so, do you feel compelled to do it. Some of you may be wondering, “How do I know what God has called me to do?” That’s a question that many Christians wrestle with today.

The only way to know what God has called you to do (or what God is calling you to do) is to be in constant communication with Him. Now, I can already hear some of you saying, “But I pray to Him every day!” and I’m sure some of you do. But you will notice that I said, “communicate with,” not “talk to.” Communication implies a two-way conversation. Sometimes we Christians get so busy talking to God that He can’t get a word in edgewise and even if He did, we wouldn’t hear it because we are so busy talking.

“OK,” you say, “what do I need to do to hear God’s message for me?” The first thing you need to do is to be quiet. Then you need to listen. Note that “listen” is an active verb not a passive verb. Listening is something that we do intentionally, and it takes effort. We need to listen to God speaking to us when we hear a sermon. We need to listen to God speaking to us when we read and study our Bible. We need to listen to God speaking to us when we are praying. Sometimes, the best way to listen to God is to get away from all the distractions of life and just listen. It could be in a quiet, out of the way place outside somewhere, or it

could be while you are sitting in the bathtub or standing in the shower preparing for the day ahead.

Whatever God has called you to do for Him, do you feel compelled to obey Him the way Paul did? Remember the story of Mary and Martha ([Luke 10:38-42](#))? Martha was so busy serving that she didn't have time to listen to the Lord. Mary, on the other hand, sat at His feet and listened.

This gospel message that we are to proclaim to the world contains the most powerful truth ever declared. Belief in this truth results in God's righteousness being applied to us, and it results in us having the faith to serve with humility and to continue on with confidence. Through this confident faith in God, we can face anything that happens to us in this life knowing that God truly loves us and will take care of us.

Finally – we learned that Paul felt indebted to God. That's why he worked so tirelessly to proclaim the Gospel message to everyone. He didn't work hard to earn his salvation. He knew that his salvation had been given to him as a free gift. The reason for his hard work was to give a gift back to God for the incredible gift that has been given to him. In fact, Paul realized that God had saved him so that he would do good works.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#))

James expressed something similar.

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself. But someone will say, "You have faith; and I have works. Show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ([James 2:17-20](#))

Now I know we are not obligated in any way to pay God back for our salvation. It truly is a free gift. However – knowing the incredible magnitude of this gift and how undeserving we are, we should all feel compelled to do whatever we can for Him in order to show our gratitude.

How are you showing your gratitude?

Let's pray.