

1:17 *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”*

### **The Problem and Solution**

- God is righteous. *“To declare that the LORD is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him”* (Psalm 92:15). God the Son is righteous: *“...of the Son [the Father] says [in Psalm 45:6,7], ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness’”* (Hebrews 1:8,9). His perfect nature is expressed in His commands to us in the Law of the Bible: *“...the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good”* (Romans 7:12). God is righteous.
- We are not.
  - *“There is none righteous, not even one”* (Romans 3:10).
  - *“...do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?”* (1 Corinthians 6:9).
  - *“...the Lord knows how...to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment”* (2 Peter 2:9).
- Remember the question of the disciples: *“...who can be saved?”* (Matthew 19:25). Jesus answered, *“with people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”* (19:26).<sup>1</sup> The Gospel shows us how a righteous Judge acquits an unrighteous people without Himself becoming unrighteous.

### **The Righteousness of God Revealed in One Place**

- *“In [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed.”* The *“righteousness of God”* is connected to *“salvation”* (1:16).

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<sup>1</sup> See also Mark 10:26,27; Luke 18:26,27.

- *“Salvation”* is not primarily therapeutic – our greatest need is not emotional health.
- *“Salvation”* is not primarily intellectual – our greatest need is not getting accurate knowledge of facts.
- *“Salvation”* is not primarily communal – our greatest need is not belonging to community.
- *“Salvation”* is not primarily pragmatic – our greatest need is not usefulness or having the tools to live a productive, contributing life.
- *“Salvation”* is set here in the context of God’s role as Judge. The Gospel saves those who are believing in it because it reveals the righteousness of the divine Judge.
- All humanity will stand before God the Creator to give an account – did they live according to the purpose for which they were created (glorifying Him as God by obeying His commands)? The answer for all of us is “no.” Are we “right” before the “righteous” Judge? No. Paul will build this case later, but it’s worth reading now: *“...both Jews and Greeks are under sin...there is none righteous, no, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God...there is none who does good, there is not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (3:9-12,23).

### **Learning a New and Very Important Word**

- *“Righteousness”* is going to be a very important idea in Romans, but so is a related word, “justification.”<sup>2</sup> “Justification” is being declared “righteous” by God. It isn’t being righteous, because we aren’t (see Romans 3:10). It’s being declared righteous by God because another righteousness has been credited to our account – Jesus’ righteousness: *“...by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us...righteousness”* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

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<sup>2</sup> These two words are from the same root in the original Greek of the New Testament: “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) and being “justified” (δικαιωω), or “justification” (δικαιωσις).

- These theological terms (righteousness and justification) aren't part of our everyday vocabulary, but since they're important in the Bible, we should make sure we're familiar with them. Here are ways Baptists new and old have defined these terms:
  - “Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, IV.B.).
  - “Those whom God effectually calls He also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting them as righteous, not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone. They are not justified because God reckons as their righteousness either their faith, their believing, or any other act of evangelical obedience. They are justified wholly and solely because God imputes to them Christ's righteousness. He imputes to them Christ's active obedience to the whole law and His passive obedience in death. They receive Christ's righteousness by faith, and rest on Him. They do not possess or produce this faith themselves, it is the gift of God. Faith which receives Christ's righteousness and depends on Him is the sole instrument of justification, yet this faith is not alone in the person justified, but is always accompanied by all the other saving graces. And it is not a dead faith, but works by love” (1689 Baptist Confession, 11.1,2).
- The only way the revealing of *“the righteousness of God”* is *“the power of God for salvation to everyone who is believing”* and not eternal condemnation is because believers are given a great gift before the judgment seat of God: a righteousness that is impossible for us

- to achieve, a righteousness that is absolutely perfect, a righteousness that is credited to our account from someone else. That Someone is Jesus, Who lived a life as a real human being which was perfectly righteous, perfectly obedient to God's Law, and perfectly holy. The righteousness of that life is credited to every believer in Jesus. We are judged not by our lives (that would result in eternal condemnation), but by the life of Jesus.
- *“...those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ...through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men...through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous”* (Romans 5:17-19).
  - *“...by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us...righteousness”* (1 Corinthians 1:30).
  - Paul tells us that *“as to the righteousness which is in the Law,”* he was *“found blameless.”* He dares not stand before God in his own righteousness, though: *“...I count all things to be loss [including his own righteousness] in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them [including his own righteousness] but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith”* (Philippians 3:6,8,9).

### **Out of Faith into Greater Faith**

- Notice Paul's phrase: *“...from faith to faith.”* Why does he pile up these two prepositional phrases?

## The Beginning of Faith

- “...*from faith*” refers to the first step. Paul spoke about it in 1:16, where the Gospel “*is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*” In this saving and powerful Gospel we see with the “eyes of faith” the revealing of God’s righteousness. He is a righteous Judge. We are guilty sinners. He acquits us. How can He acquit guilty sinners without compromising His righteousness? The Gospel reveals this. His Son pays the penalty for our guilt and credits His perfect life to our account (the “great exchange”). This is revealed in the Gospel, and we “see” it by faith in the Gospel.
- Faith which leads to salvation must be in the heard and known facts of the Gospel. Saving faith is not a vague belief in a “God,” but in the historical reality of what God accomplished through His Son’s incarnation (the eternally divine Son becoming human), His life, death, resurrection, and enthronement in heaven: “*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).  
READ Romans 10:14,15,17.
- The Gospel is about hearing and believing the objective, historical facts of what God has done to save us in Christ. It is not about feelings or morality (though both of those are affected by the belief in the facts). It is not a philosophy or a way of living life. It is a

proclaimed message about something that God actually did at a point in human history.<sup>3</sup>

## Continually Maturing and Progressing in Faith

- Notice again the way Paul describes the role of faith: “...*from faith to faith.*” The righteousness of God is revealed out of, or from, the Gospel when we are believing in it. But Paul adds another prepositional phrase to it: “...*to faith.*” The faith in the saving Gospel doesn’t stop with a one-time acquittal before the judgment seat of God. It goes on and grows “*to*” a goal, a purpose, an ever-deepening understanding and application of that Gospel throughout life. The New Testament doesn’t just give us a one-page description of what Jesus did for us and then command us to believe it. It is large and rich, describing how God’s work through the Gospel should affect how we see all things, do all things, and how we interact with others. The saving power of the Gospel is simple, but the growth in living out its implications is life-long.
- Consider the words of Jesus: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*” (Matthew 28:19,20). The N.T. criteria for baptism aren’t many: repentance (Acts 2:38), belief in “*the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*” (Acts 8:12), or belief that “*Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (Acts 8:37). But baptism, which symbolizes the receiving of new life in Christ, isn’t the end. It’s the beginning. The revelation of the saving gift of righteousness from God which comes

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<sup>3</sup> I should add that your testimony about how the Gospel affected you is not the Gospel. You are not evangelizing (proclaiming the Gospel to the lost) if all you do is tell what the Gospel did for you without explaining what the Gospel is!

by faith leads to a bigger and bigger faith that fills all of life.

- The disciples are able to plead with Jesus, *“increase our faith”* (Luke 17:5). They believe, but are asking that faith in the saving work of Christ be applied, too, to their relationships with each other (17:1-4). The father of the boy afflicted with a demon begs, *“I do believe; help my unbelief”* (Mark 9:24). Faith is not one-time or static, but grows from our beginning moments of salvation into a whole-life reality.
- Paul speaks of church leaders as having been given to the Church by Christ. READ Ephesians 4:12,13. In this case, it is not the introductory *“faith”* in the saving Gospel, but *“the faith”* in which we grow together over time.
- In Philippians 1:25, the apostle speaks of our *“progress and joy in the faith.”*
- Toward the end of Paul’s life, in his “Pastoral Epistles” (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus), he speaks of *“the faith”* as a whole system of doctrine, or larger body of beliefs. These are the applications of the simple Gospel to all of life, worldview, relationships, life together as the Church, etc.: READ 1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:5,9,13.

## One of the Most Important – and Hidden – Scriptures in the Old Testament

- Remember - the first thing Paul told us about the Gospel was that it was promised by God throughout the Old Testament: *“...the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures”* (1:1,2). In 1:17 Paul gives us a specific example.
- Paul quotes here from Habakkuk: *“Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but **the righteous**”*

*will live by his faith”* (2:4).<sup>4</sup> In Habakkuk, the Lord’s statement is in response to the prophet’s complaint against Him. The Lord has revealed that He is sending the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem in response to centuries of idolatry among the covenant people. Habakkuk, upset that God is using a pagan people to punish the covenant people, says, *“why are You silent when the wicked [the Babylonians] swallow up those more righteous than they [the Jews]?”* (1:13). The Lord’s response that *“the righteous will live by faith”* (2:4b) refutes Habakkuk’s understanding that the Jews were *“more righteous”* than the Babylonians; after all, Habakkuk himself had complained that *“the wicked surround the righteous”* (1:4), even among the Jews! God’s standard of righteousness was not popular among the backslidden Jewish people of Habakkuk’s generation. God’s standard was faith in the scriptural promises to save through the promised Messiah/Christ. **Both Jews and Gentiles (the Babylonians) were unrighteous before God. Only the remnant, which lived by faith in God, was counted righteous.**

- I’ve always loved the fact that Paul launches the “flagship of Christian theology” (his letter to the Romans) with a quote from what we call a “Minor Prophet.” No one names Habakkuk as their favorite book of the Bible; I myself can’t even spell it right most of the time! But out of Habakkuk comes a hugely foundational verse for the accurate understanding of the Gospel as *“the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”* (that is, everyone who lives by faith)! This is a reminder that there are no unimportant parts of our Bibles!
- The revelation of the righteousness of God is a recurrent theme in the Old Testament. This is a worthy study for you this week: READ Psalm 98:1,2; Isaiah 46:13; 51:6-8; 62:1,2.

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<sup>4</sup> This Habakkuk passage is also quoted in Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:37,38.