

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 1:8-17 **“Proud Of A Powerful Gospel”**

January 17, 2015
(2nd Sunday after the Epiphany)

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Following Christ From City Center!”

IB: ROMANS 1:8-17
"PROUD OF A POWERFUL GOSPEL"

Preview Of Themes , Build A Bond, 5:1 Structure

1) v.8 THANKSGIVING FOR THEIR FAITH.

Salutation (vv.1-7) + Prayer/Thanksgiving (vv.8-17)

Thesis 1

Form = Proposition 1 (v.8) + For (vv.9-10) + For (vv.11-12) // vv.13-17

8a

First,

Prayer = Expectation To Begin A Letter, 3:2, Thanks (v.8) → Petition (v.9-17)

b

I thank **my God** through Jesus Christ/ for **all of you**,

1:5,7; My (4x), 16:5, EXORDIUM (vv.8-10)

c

because **your faith** is proclaimed in the whole of the world. //15:14, Acts 28:15, Christians Know Of Rome's Church

//1 Thess. 1:1-10, Initial Compliment (*captatio benevolentiae*)

2) vv.9-10 THE GOSPEL: PAUL'S PRAYERS, TRAVEL PLANS TO ROME. Bio //15:14-33

Reason 1

Insight Into Paul's Prayers, No Visit Yet, Never Far From His Mind

9a

For God is **my** witness,

Oath (2 Cor. 1:23, 11:31), God Can Attest The Truth Of Paul's Prayers

b

whom I serve (worship) with **my** spirit (*pneuma*) in THE GOSPEL of his Son, [15:16], Prayer = Service //1:1

in my spirit = Inward Side Of Apostolic Service

c

that *without ceasing* I mention you *always* in **my** prayers,

From Thanks To Petition, Frustration Shows

10

asking (*begging*) that *somehow* by God's will

My (4x), Paul's Desire/God's Will, Almost An Apology

I may now *at last* succeed IN COMING TO YOU.

//15:14-33

Were There Complaints Against Paul?

3) vv.11-12 PAUL'S GIFTS TO THEM AND THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT.

Reason 2

Real Emotion NARRATIO, vv.11-15

11a

For I long to see you,

Strengthen = Deepen Existing Faith, 16:25

b

that I may impart to you some spiritual gift (*charisma pneumaticon*) to strengthen you, //5:15-16

12

that is (*de*), that we may be mutually encouraged by **each other's faith**,

1:5b, Him As Well

both yours and mine.

v.12 Corrects Himself, Avoid Misunderstanding (*epanorthosis*)

Builds Rapport

2') vv.13-16a THE GOSPEL: PAUL'S DESIRES, TRAVEL PLANS TO ROME.

Thesis 2

Form = Proposition (vv.13-15) + For (v. 16a) + For (vv.16b-17)

13a

a I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, 1 Cor. 10:1, Double Neg. , Disclosure Formula + Direct Address

b

that I have often intended **TO COME TO YOU**,

//v.10b, 15:22 Below, Acts 19:21, 23:11 On Wish

(but thus far have been prevented),

p.v., 15:18-24, 1 Thess. 2:8(Satan), 1 Cor. 16:8-9(Open Door)

16:5, Jesus On The Harvest (John 4:34-48)

c

b in order that I may reap some harvest (fruit) *among you* as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

15:28 (Gift for Jerusalem?) *your locality*
Written 56/57, Paul Not Arrive Till 60

God Shows No Partiality

14

b' (So) I am under obligation (indebted)

13:8, 1 Cor. 9:16, Debt Of Love

both to Greeks (speakers) and to barbarians,

By Language & Culture/ Urban vs. Rural?

both to the wise and to the foolish:

14:4, Romans Saw Themselves As Sophisticated/Educated

Great Pagan City Full Of Polytheism, Temples

15

a' so I am eager to preach THE GOSPEL to you also who are in Rome. //v.9, Not Just An Initial Response

16a

For I am not ashamed of THE GOSPEL.

Litotes: Denying Opposite = "I am proud of the gospel!"

Reason 1

PROPOSITIO (vv.16b-17), Critical Insights!

1:2-4 Gospel's Content, Issue = Dead/Raised Jewish Carpenter As God The Son Of God

Reason 2

1') vv.16b-17 THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST FOR A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

b a

For it is the power of **God** for salvation to **every one** who has **faith**,

//3:22, 4:11, Not Another Idea, Power 1:4

c

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

For All! //2:9-10, Previews 9-11, Chronology, Origins, 4:1-25 (Abraham)

Reason 3

Last Element (v.16b/v.17b) Sharpens First (v.16a/v.17a)

17a b

For in it the *righteousness* of (from) God is revealed from **faith** unto **faith**;

Is. 51:5-8, Ps. 98:2, (Previews 12-15)

b

as it is written, "The Righteous One shall live by **faith**." = Jesus' faithfulness, Chap. 1-8, *Hab. 2:4* (LXX), Gal. 3:11

Faith (Evidence-based trust) Has Always Been The Way To Salvation: Justify, Sanctify, Glorify
be righteous = Covenant Loyalty, Rightly Related To God By Faith

Faith Is Both *Perception* (revealed) And *Commitment* (trust)

In The Gospel God Gives Evidence (Reveals) Of God's Faithfulness To The Whole Human Family, i.e. *the world*

3 Patterns: 1) Letter Conventions, 2) Surface Structure (5:1 Chiasm), 3) Argument Form : 2 Theses + Reasons (*For*)

Romans 15:22-24 (Echoes 1:8-17)

"²²This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little."

A Brief Treatment Of IB: Romans 1:8-17

Romans 1:8-17 is the next thought unit. Four common terms that mark the beginning and end of the paragraph are *First* (v.8a/v.16c), *God* (v.8b/v.16b), a universal [*all of you* (v.8b)//*every one* (v.16b)], and *faith* (v.8c/vv.16b-17 [4x]). The unit has five parts (1. v.8, 2. vv.9-10, **3. 11-12**, 4. 13-16a, 5. 16b-17) arranged in a 5:1 concentric surface structure (1-2-**3**-2'-1') with the focus on the center (3. vv.11-12) where the word *faith*— also featured in the frames (1//1')— is present and confirms our analysis of the surface structure. On either side of the center in 2. vv.9-10 // 2' vv.13-16a the word *gospel* (v.9b/vv.15-16a [2x]) and the phrase *in coming to you* (v.10)// *to come to you* (v.13) are found in parallel, which also confirms our analysis. In the letter are echoes of Paul's public speech and reasoning in a culture where a written document was secondary to living discourse. In terms of epistolary conventions, this paragraph is the expected thanksgiving/prayer section which Paul has again lengthened and modified for his purposes.

In addition to the concentric surface structure (1-2-**3**-2'-1') and epistolary genre form, a third ordering principle is a form of logical argumentation with an assertion backed with reasons indicated by the cue word *for* (Gk. *gar*). Thesis 1 (v.8, that Paul thanks God through Christ for the fame of their faith) is supported by Warrant 1 (*for*, vv.9-10) in which God serves as a witness that Paul has long desired to make a visit and by Warrant 2 (*for*, vv.11-12) which give the reason for Paul's desired visit, i.e. to impart and received blessing through the interchange of faith and spiritual gifts. Thesis 2 (vv.13-15a, that Paul has so far been prevented from coming but is eager to preach in Rome) is supported by Warrant 1 (*for*, v.16a) since Paul is not ashamed of the news that God's Son is a crucified and risen Jewish commoner, by Warrant 2 (*for*, vv.16b-c) that this message is God's power of salvation for Jews and Greeks in that order, and by Warrant 3 (*for*, v.17) that God's saving actions are to be received by trust from beginning to end, as Habakkuk prophesied. Commentators have long noted that Paul, having begun a series in v.8a with *First*, never gets around to saying *And secondly* to continue the series. But there is more than one way to indicate sequence and enumeration, and this Paul does in v.13a with his oft-used disclosure formula, the double negative *I do not want you to be unaware* plus a fresh direct address— *brethren*. A fourth ordering principle concerns the classic parts of persuasive rhetoric: a *Prescript* where introductions are made (vv.1-7), an *Exordium* to mark common ground and win sympathy (vv.8-10), a *Narratio* to tell a story (vv.11-15), a *Propositio* to present the theses (vv.16b-17). Paul is working with four tools at once: 1) the letter form, 2) a concentric oral discourse structure, 3) a Thesis + Warrant logical argument, 4) traditional rhetorical categories. He is a sophisticated writer to do all this at one time. Very impressive!

Paul's hearers in the house churches of Rome knew how letters were structured, and Paul meets their expectation in the prayer of v.8 which notes his thanks for their growing reputation as a faithful people. Flattery was expected. So how is it— they must have thought— that the great *apostle to the Gentiles* had not yet— in twenty plus years of mission— made it to the center of the Empire? It's not because Paul has not been insistent in begging God for opportunity, which might yet be granted (vv.9-10). And if so, it will be a benefit to them both, which is a statement of appropriate humility since Paul was not the founder of the church at Rome but a legendary and controversial missionary from the East. Paul has not get come to Rome because he could not and was not able; he has *been prevented* (v.13b where the passive voice implies *prevented by God's providence*). His authorization is to all, first Jews, then all manner of Gentiles, sophisticated Greek speakers and backwoods rustics. Paul is not ashamed his Lord is a crucified and risen Jew from backwoods Galilee. This is God's new form of power; it is the very place God acts to welcome the world back home. If true, it's worthy of our complete trust forever (Hab. 2:4).

PROUD OF A POWERFUL GOSPEL

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel....”

Something worth living by and bragging on.

R O M A N S 1 : 1 6 a

Imagine a long line of dominoes. You’ve seen them on television with their elaborate patterns. When the first is tipped, a long chain follows. Jesus set up twelve dominoes— his disciples. He called the unlikely, poured into them his kingdom vision, filled their heads with stories and their hearts with memories of his encounters with the sick and tormented. And finally he empowered them with his Spirit after the crisis of his death and the surprise of his bodily resurrection from the dead. They were now perfectly positioned. He then tipped the chain. There are over 2.2 billion Christians in the world today, and that does not count all who’ve lived and died over the years with their eyes set on him. That's a lot of dominoes, and new ones tumble every day. This movement to Jesus is still going on.

In the 1880s, Robert Wilder, a missionary kid from India. During college he signed a pledge with friends to become a missionary. Because he was physically frail, he never fulfilled the pledge. Instead, he encouraged others to take up the task. One domino fell.

During a preaching tour in Chicago, Wilder spoke to an audience that included Samuel Moffett who signed the same pledge and within two years was in Korea. Another domino fell.

A few years later, Moffatt shared the gospel with a man who had become disillusioned with Taoist practice. Kiel Sun-chu trusted Christ, and another domino fell. In 1907, Kiel was one of the leaders of the famous Pyongyang revival.¹ In January of that year, spontaneous prayer and confession broke out during regular church meetings. Thousands of dominoes fell. It was the birth of an independent,

¹ www.byfaith.co.uk/paulbyfaithtvmathewthoughts18. Also “A Century After North Korean Revival, Dreams of an Encore,” www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007.

self-sustaining Korean church. When Kiel died in 1935, 5,000 attended his funeral. The church in Korea now numbers over 15 million, and it sends more foreign missionaries than any country outside the U.S. Millions of dominoes continue to fall.² Richard Stearns, President of the Christian relief and development agency *World Vision*, concludes his telling of the Korea story with these words:

“As Christians, we are all dominoes in the chain reaction set off by Jesus 2,000 years ago. The amazing thing about dominoes is that the chain reaction always starts small– with just one. Whether you are sponsoring children, filling backpacks for inner-city schools, talking to your own children, or praying earnestly, you have no idea what how big the impact will be as God multiplies your faithfulness.”³

The Apostle Paul was one of the early dominoes. Peter had three years to adjust to Jesus’s strange new ways before being sent out, but not Paul. He was just *whacked*, to use a Mafia hit-man analogy. The Jesus who is patient with most can be decisive and blunt with others. For the twelve it was gradual, “Are you the Lord?” But for Paul of a sudden, “Who are you, Lord? When Paul was tipped over by an unexpected encounter with the risen Jesus who interrupted his plans to discipline Jewish believers in far-off Damascus,⁴ it set off a chain of conversions as for thirty years he planted churches around the eastern end of the Mediterranean and wrote letters back and forth to encourage and keep them on track. Christianity was then a brand new thing, and for that reason suspect to many who shared the assumption that the only good faith was an old faith, which we also were, but only if you consider us as a fresh form of ancient Judaism reorganized around Jesus as Messiah and God the Son, which is precisely what Paul thought. We don’t often say it this way, but it’s true. What is Christianity? Answer: We are ancient Judaism recentered in the person of Jesus, who he was and what he did, which leads to an innovation in our doctrine of God’s personal complexity: Yahweh, the Lord, is not just One if One means solitary and magnificently alone like Allah; the Lord is also– without ceasing to be

² See Phillip Connor, “6 facts about South Korea’s growing Christian population,” www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/12/6-facts-about-christianity-in-south-korea.

³ Rich Stearns, "Spiritual Dominoes," *World Vision Magazine* (Winter 2011).

⁴ Acts 9:1-31.

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One God— a communion of three persons. My name is Pastor Phil; God’s name, God’s self-designation is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we forget our Jewish roots, we deny and distort our Lord because Jesus was and is a Jew. I love the old 70s bumper sticker, “My boss is a Jewish carpenter!”

Our friend Paul once wrote a letter to a church he didn’t found in a city he’d never visited, the Letter to the Romans, because he had something valuable for them, and they had something for him in return.⁵ He also hoped they would serve as a base of support for his push west into Spain, which was then *the ends of the earth*. As an embodiment of the message, he would pass through them on the way to somewhere else. That’s because Paul was an apostle, a missionary pioneer, and deep in his soul was the conviction that in Jesus— as nowhere else— the God of the Jews was changing the world through the call to trust in and become a follower of Jesus because he was the only one God stamped approved in a full resurrection, as if to say, “This is me! This is my outlet. This is where *I Am* is to be found. You may see my shadows elsewhere, but here you see my face!” And where this letter is prayerfully read, things happen. Lights go on, hearts are warmed, thinking changes, worlds realign, new chains of dominoes begin tipping and tumbling. When illumined by the Spirit, Romans has the power to rearrange the furniture of mind and heart.

Now Paul could have stated the first half of verse 16 as a simple assertion, “I am proud of the gospel.” Instead, as a skillful ancient speaker, he uses a double negative,⁶ not the simple “I am proud of the gospel,” but the more complex and evocative “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Why did Paul make that rhetorical move? Two reasons, the first from Paul himself, “Because,” he says, “it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has trust, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Why be ashamed and timid about a message that changes lives so deeply and brings them back into a trusting relationship with their Creator?” Why be ashamed of penicillin and its effect on infections? Why be ashamed of education and its assault on ignorance? Why be ashamed of the philosophical foundations of capitalism which in our day is raising so many around the world out of the grip of deep poverty in a

⁵ 1:11-12.

⁶ The name for this form is *litotes*.

way no mere relief program could equal?⁷ Why be ashamed of something when the results are so manifestly good? And what Jesus does for people is very good, now and later. He himself is the bridge over which we are invited to walk back into God's embrace to know and be known by the One who made us. He is the medicine that heals our broken and alienated relationship with God.

And secondly, because— in my observation— the church is always tempted to lose its confidence and to put its candle under a basket, which then turns us into a private little religious club rather than a vibrant missionary movement. Perhaps our lives are compromised in some way and we feel embarrassed, so we go silent because we fear exposure. Or perhaps we hear people, perhaps smarter or more degreed than we are, make fun of our faith or attack it in the media, and so we feel intimidated and go silent. And I think this is where we are now in this cultural moment. The winds of the culture have shifted, and we now find ourselves having to regain our footing in a new world, a world of pluralism where our long held place of privilege has been replaced. The world no longer works with our assumptions. It is a time to be thoughtful, a time to be patient, a time to revisit the basics and be prepared to dialog and converse, but not a time to be *ashamed of the gospel* or hesitant to name the name of Jesus in the public square, and here Pastor Tim Keller is a good example since he serves an orthodox Presbyterian church in a highly-pluralistic town: New York City. Keller writes that he often hears people say, "I don't know which religion is true" or "No one can know the truth." He says it often leads to a conversation like this one:

"I'm talking to someone who does not believe in Christianity or Christ. At some point she responds suddenly, "Wait a minute, what are you trying to do to me?"

"I'm trying to evangelize you."

"You mean you're trying to convert me?"

"Yeah."

"You're trying to get me to adopt your view of spiritual reality and convert me?"

"Yeah."

"How narrow! Nobody should say that their view of spirituality is better than anybody else and try to convert them. Everybody should just leave everybody else alone."

⁷ Michael Chapman, "Bono: 'Capitalism Takes More People Out of Poverty than Aid,'" www.cnsnews.com/blog/michael-w-chapman/bono.

"Wait a minute ..." I say. "You want me to adopt your take on reality; you want me to adopt your view of all the various religions. What are you doing to me? What you're saying is, you have a take on spiritual reality, and you think I'd be better off and the world better off if we adopted yours. I have my take on spiritual reality and I think mine is better than yours, and I'm trying to convert you to mine If you say, 'Don't evangelize anybody,' that is to evangelize me, into your Western, white, individualistic, privatized understanding of religion."

Keller concludes with a question, "Who's more narrow? It's not narrow to make an exclusive truth claim because everybody makes an exclusive truth claim Everybody has a take on reality. Narrowness is not the content of a truth claim. Narrowness is our attitude toward the people who don't share our point of view."⁸

Paul's first century world was a marketplace of ideas and religious options; there were spokesman on nearly every corner hawking their ideas. And, after a long run of our faith really being the only option in town— at least here in the South! we are moving back to an open market of options. So get ready for interesting and mind-stretching conversations with Buddhists and Muslims, Jedi's and Jews, used-to-be's and never-beens, atheists and pantheists, neo-pagans and paleo-Christians, Wiccans and Wahabi's, Sikhs and skeptics. What an exciting time to put our wares on the table and watch the risen Jesus make his case through us.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

It was customary when writing a letter in that world to include a prayer near the beginning, normally a wish for health or thanks for the good qualities of the ones to whom you were writing. And so Paul offers a thanksgiving for the faith of the church at Rome that was so widely known he can claim— without too much exaggeration— that it *is proclaimed in the whole of the world*. For this, Paul says, *I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ for all of you*. If you had listened to Paul's prayers, you'd have heard him circle over a mental map as he gave thanks for each of the churches he planted and their leaders because he knew them so well and carried them in his heart. I've only planted one new church, Northeast UMC in Columbia, and to them alone am I a spiritual father, but to the other eight I've served— including four

⁸ Dallas Willard, ed., *A Place for Truth* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010), 63-64.

at one time- I am not a father, just the next minister, and so I understand what it felt like for Paul to anticipate a new ministry in a church he did not plant and in a place he never visited. Paul was a Methodist and knew you start off polite! *What a great bunch of people. Everywhere I go I hear about your faith and faithfulness. I can't wait to come see you.* Manners are important. Knowing that faithful leaders preceded and will follow you is important. While here at Main Street, I build on the work of others, a line of ministers that goes back to the mid-1850s, many of whose stern portraits are preserved in our History Room upstairs. Hopefully I build with quality materials. But only at the end when the fire of God test each minister's works will we know whether we built with wood, hay, and straw or with gold, silver and precious stones which pass through the flames.⁹

But because Rome was the center of the Empire, and because Paul had been thus far frustrated in his attempts to visit the eternal city, I sense a special personal intensity and longing in verses 9 through 10. Here he uses the word *my* three times: *my witness, my spirit, my prayers*, along with several other word that indicate emotional intensity: *without ceasing, always, somehow, at last*. It has something of the nature of a love letter, full of longing. Paul is clearly invested. Rome is on his bucket list, and the writing of the letter is a clue he senses it may at last be God's will for him to get there. Little does he know that it will be as a prisoner on a boat from Caesarea on the way to appeal to Caesar himself, but get there he will, our best guess being three years after he wrote the letter. It was written in 57 or 58; he arrived in 60, and it's probably good God gave them several years to read and re-read the letter before meeting the man. Several times over the years I've had the privilege of reading the books of a scholar and then later meeting the man. I already knew his thought, but to ask questions and discuss it personally was an event of a different quality. After that, when I re-read the books, I heard the voice of the man. Hear the passion and hope of Paul in these verses about his prayers and dreams:

“For God is my witness, whom I worship with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, begging that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.”

⁹ 1 Cor. 3:10-15. For a fresh read on these issues, see Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory: A Protestant View Of The Cosmic Drama* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015), especially Chapter 4, “If We Are Saved by Grace, Why Do We Need Purgatory?” vv.91-116.

I've noticed something. Nothing touches people like being prayed for in a personal way. Their guard is down; they're listening, and often— if the one praying is sensitive to the guidance of the Spirit— the Lord will touch them deeply; it will show in their emotions when you hit the target. I'm always surprised by the number of people who tell me they've never been prayed for by name before. And when they ask— as they often do when the prayer is over— how I knew just what to pray for, I laugh and say, "Me and Jesus are tight!" and then I admit the truth, which is, "I don't know; sometimes it just happens. It means a third party is present." Each of us ought to have a spiritual bucket list like Paul, something big and bold and worthy of longing and planning and prayer. For him it was getting to Rome and even beyond Rome to Spain. Here the amazing Victorian Christian George Mueller is a worthy example of such prayer as evidenced in his diary:

"In November 1844, I began to pray for the conversion of five individuals. I prayed every day without a single intermission, whether sick or in health, on land, on sea, and whatever the pressure of my engagements. Eighteen months elapsed before the first was converted. I thanked God and prayed on. Five years elapsed, then the second. I thanked God and prayed on for the three. Day by day, I continued; six years passed before the third was converted. I thanked God for the three and went on praying for the two. Thirty-six years later the two sons of a friend were still not converted, and he wrote, 'But I hope in God, I pray on, and look for the answer. They are not yet, but they will be.'"

In 1897, fifty-two years after he began, these two finally converted, but it was after Mueller died. He understood what Jesus meant when he told his disciples "they should always pray and not give up."¹⁰ That was the Apostle Paul, who believed that if the dream to first write and then go to Rome was from God, it was his job to pray for the plan to be realized. I have dreams only God can fulfill, and if the dreams are his, may they come, and come soon! I'm as only as Paul was when he wrote Romans!

Whenever two Christians meet, there ought to be a mutually beneficial exchange, even if it's brief. They are one in whom Christ dwells, as are you. The Holy Spirit has something to give you both. This makes every face to face meeting full of adventure and surprises. What was once a meeting you wanted to avoid is now

¹⁰ Ben Patterson, *Deepening Your Conversation with God* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1999), 105-106.

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chock full of possibilities, and I wonder how many times we miss God’s gifts of wisdom and provision because they come wrapped in strange packages.

I know this because my life and ministry was once saved by a mentally ill Catholic charismatic woman who had such troubles in personal relationships that she stayed home and prayed five to six hours a day. I had not seen her in six months when she called the office one afternoon, “Pastor Phil, as I was praying today the Lord gave me five things to say to you. Do you want hear them?”

That was how the conversation began: no Hello, no small talk. Since I knew she was a troubled soul and since I claimed to believe– at least theoretically– in the spiritual gifts of knowledge and wisdom and prophecy, I thought I ought to be at least kind, so I said, “Yes, Sylvia. I’d love to. Thanks for calling” She told me the first, and I began to tremble; her first arrow struck the center of the target. When she told me the second it was so accurate I knew it was the Lord. How could she know otherwise? I asked her to wait a moment as I got out of the chair and on my face on the floor for the last three. It was as close to receiving an email from God as I’ve had, and the effect instantaneous. The internal battle I had been fighting vaporized like a fog in the sunrise. If I had written her off as a religious nut case, I would not have received the gifts the Lord gave through her to me, gifts I needed to survive.

So what if you entered this afternoon and tomorrow with a new mindset, that every meeting and conversation, no matter how trivial, is pregnant with possibilities, even if it’s just a chance to practice kindness and patience and love and listening with someone who rarely gets such courtesies. Is this not what Paul expected to happen when he finally came to Rome? Verse 11, “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you,” then the flip side in verse 12, “that is, that we may be *mutually encouraged* by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” It’s how Paul lived, in confidence he has something to give, and equally aware of how much he needed to receive from the Lord through other people. Life with Jesus is not an independent project, but a deep exchange, the give and take of community and full of surprises. God has made it so, and no one is more vulnerable to making a shipwreck of the faith and being taken out by our foe than the isolated believer.

It is just past the center of the unit in verse 13 that Paul starts over again with a disclosure formula and a direct address as if was there in front of them, and again we sense Paul’s deep feelings rising to the surface as he rehearses just how important is his dream of making it to Rome, “I do not want to you be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you, but have thus far *been* prevented,”

which is passive voice implying it was God who did the preventing. It was God's will that he come, that he write Romans beforehand, but it was also God's will that the fulfillment not be immediate, and that delay— odd as it sounds— was also a gift because it deepened Paul's longing and sharpened his desire. If Paul had been able to go to Rome immediately, it would simply have meant catching a boat across the Adriatic to Italy from the port just west of Corinth, a short hop. He could easily have said all this stuff face-to-face to the church at Rome, and we would not have this magnificent treatise. He wrote it because he could not yet come; it was a substitute for his personal presence, and the good his delay caused has had incalculable influence for two thousand years. It's OK to wish and pray and hope and plan, but then obey God each day and leave the timing to a higher authority. God's will does not depend on your leverage.

There's a word that haunts me, though it is no longer much spoken of in our culture, and that is the word *duty*. I will often do the things I ought because of promises made and the vows taken, not because I like it all the time, and if that sounds a bit military and chivalrous, so be it, because those are two strands of my inherited southern male culture woven into a single chord, and will not apologize for them in a world that dismisses such. My best guess is that they came from my father. He always treated women with great care and a simple dignity of manners that made them feel safe, which is what you need to do if you are their OB as well as their GP.

As a boy I often heard him drive out the driveway in the middle of the night on a house calls or to the ER to sew up wreck victims, and he did it whether he got paid or not because that was the duty and privilege of being Dr. Jim, and I figured that if he could be that kind of doc, I need to be that kind of pastor. I would much rather be duty-driven than convenience-driven or leisure-driven. Duty will make you faithful; convenience will make you sloppy. It did not hurt he was once the best drilled sergeant in the Clemson Pershing rifles or that he met every girl I ever brought home at the back door with the same words, "Welcome aboard, Miss. Welcome to the good ship Thrailkill." They always smiled because they knew they were being honored by a gentleman; one even curtsied if my memory is correct. It embarrassed me then, since formalities were even then on the way out, but now I see it as a wonderful courtesy and fine example. Just ask Lori; he did it to her, and she never forgot. He loved Clemson. He loved the Navy. He loved MUSC and being a doc. He loved my mother Betty and his mother Lida. He loved making house calls because, as he said, "It lets me read the human document in its native habitat" as if he was some sort of medical anthropologist doing primary field research among the local natives. He

loved the Methodist Church and singling “Up From The Grave He Arose” on Easter, and he loved doing his duties with a sense of chivalry and a commitment to excellence. Duty was— for him— the baseline of an honorable life. I’ve been stamped!

I say this to say that duty and obligation are the flip side of the words privilege and promise. It’s why Paul could invoke such concepts when he spoke about his being sent to the nations in verse 14, “So I am *under obligation* both to educated Greeks and to unsophisticated hicks— which is what the word *barbarian* meant in those days— both to the wise and the foolish. It’s my duty. I am under orders.”

Everyone, and I mean everyone around us, deserves a chance to have the love of God in Jesus Christ explained to them in a way that makes sense in their world, whether they are old Greenwood or the newest immigrant. The church is for the cotillion crowd and the honky tonk angels, red necks and blue bloods, and Paul the master communicator learned to cater his presentations to the culture and capacities of his hearers, whether it was a casual conversation in the leather shop with an Italian legionnaire on his way through Corinth to the East or the academic philosophers of Athens. It was his duty to— with the Spirit’s help— put the good news about Jesus within the intellectual and cultural range of every person he met, and that is still our duty and privilege. Find out where they itch and apply your scratcher!

I don’t want a day to go by that I don’t have a conversation with someone about the Savior. And why is that? Because it’s the only thing that had power to change me, and secondly because when Jesus is spoken of in love and kindness, the power of God has a chance to move into the space and create the gift of trust, and trust is— from God’s perspective, the currency of the kingdom of God. God doesn’t need anything from us; there are no shortages in heaven where his rule is currently unchallenged. What God wants and what God enables through his grace is our trust based on real evidence, what Paul referred to six times in our short passage as *faith*. It’s not a blind leap into the dark; faith is evidence based trust that gives us new sight for the light that is already around us. There is historical evidence for Jesus and his resurrection; there is rational evidence for God’s creative power; there are philosophical demonstrations of God’s necessity; there are the personal evidences of answers to prayer, of divine appointments, of God’s highlighting Scripture, and even more directly at times in divine speaking in dreams, in visions, in healings, and in deliverances from evil. God is building a customized case with everyone, and the final question is, Will you entrust yourself to the One who offers the evidence? Even atheists have a form of faith since they trust in their own unbelief.

Did you know what Jesus lived and walked by trust? On his own he had power to do nothing, as he often confessed,¹¹ but with trust in his Father above and the intimacy of the Spirit within, he said and did amazing things all day long. Every day was a trust walk as he moved into situations for which there was no preparation but only constant dependence on invisible resources. Every situation was like starting all over again. This is why Paul at the end of the unit in verse 17 quotes from the prophet Habakkuk and applies it to Jesus, "... as it is written, 'The Righteous One shall live by faith,'" and that Righteous One is Jesus. And for us, it is his faithfulness that enables our own, because from the beginning to end it's all about trust, as Paul said in the previous verse, "For in it— meaning this good news about the actions of God— the righteousness of God is revealed from faith unto faith," or "from his faithfulness unto our trusting response." It's highly relational, with marriage as a good analogy. God grace will not make you trust, because you can no more make someone trust than you can make them love. Trust is a response to the One who is worthy of our dependence and unqualified loyalty. It's the only way God can save us. God presents abundant multi-layered evidence to everyone, then asks, "Will you trust me?" And that is life ultimate decision since it determines everything else.

CONCLUSION

What an amazing personal testimony from Paul, an ambassador of Jesus. Could it be the Word of God through Paul to us? The church says Yes and made sure it made the cut into the New Testament. But what about you?

¹¹ John 5:19-20.

Study And Discussion Questions For IA: Romans 1:8-17

1. Take your Bible and read Romans 1:8-17, first silently– as we normally do- and then several times out loud- which may seem odd if you are alone! It is important to hear yourself read it. Imagine yourself being the lector who read the letter out loud as a public performance to twenty or more people in one of the house churches of Rome around 58B.C. Listen for echoes and repeated patterns as you hear yourself read.

What did you hear when you read it aloud that you missed when you read silently?

2. It was expected that a formal letter including an opening prayer or thanksgiving.

What does Paul thank God for in v.8?

What does it mean for Jesus Christ to define how he sees God?

3. Rome was the center of the Roman Empire that circled the Mediterranean.

Why is Paul so intense in vv.9-10 about eventually coming to Rome?

Read 15:22-24 for an insight from the end of the letter.

Why had the Roman church not yet undertaken such a mission beyond its borders?

4. How are vv.11-12 a healthy picture of what happens when Christians come together?

Why is mutual encouragement and mutual strengthening such an important part of our life together?

How does our culture of individualism work against this important form of love?

5. Vv.13-16a are an important paragraph on what it means for Paul to be an apostle (one sent out by the risen Jesus as his ambassador and spokesman).

v.13 How is Paul honest about his history?

v.14 Is the gospel of Jesus for both the learned and the ignorant?

v.15 How was a crucified Jewish carpenter killed by Rome for sedition a problem?

v.16a How does Paul define the *gospel* in 1:2-4. Why is the resurrection so important?

6. If the meaning of *salvation* (v.16b) is a healed relationship with God that begins now, changes the rest of my life, and carries me into God's kingdom, why is it important?

If faith means *trust*, what information do people need to trust the God of Jesus?

If God's *righteousness* (v.17) is God's loving character coming to our rescue and doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, what is God looking for from us?

**The Reduced Modern American Gospel And The Fuller Ancient Biblical Gospel
(With thanks to Christopher Wright, Scot McKnight, N.T. Wright)**

Question?	Reduced/Shorthand Presentation (True, but not true or big enough)	Robust/Fuller Presentation (The deep faith of the church)
Question?	“Are you saved?” Church has a salvation culture of decisions.	“Are you a Jesus’ follower?” Church has a good news culture of witness and service in Jesus’ name.
Goal?	For my soul to go to heaven when I die. May tend to escapism and ignore creation as a gift the Creator promises to renew.	To be among God’s people when the kingdom of God comes down from heaven to recreate and heal the entire world God loves.
Jesus?	My personal Savior who delivers individual benefits to those who believe a series of propositions and pray <i>the sinner’s prayer</i> .	The Messiah (King) Jesus who fulfills the story of God’s chosen people as its new center and the world’s rightful ruler or Lord.
Issue?	Jesus died for your sins so you can escape God’s wrath and eternal punishment.	Jesus heals separation from God through the whole of who he is (his person) and what he does (his work, including dealing with sin and evil).
Form?	Booklet with 4-5 simple propositions about my need and a legal transaction, “If I do this, then God does that.” Ignores Old Testament. Skips from Gen. 3 to Rom. 3. Focuses on the bare minimum: God as holy, humans as sinners, Jesus as Savior, my faith, heaven.	The <i>larger story</i> of the Old and New Testaments with its plot of Creation, Crisis of sin, Call of Abraham, Covenant with Israel, Christ Jesus, Church and Spirit, Consummation and Kingdom as told in Scripture and summarized in the Creeds. Focuses on maximal range.
Scope?	The gospel is reduced to the plan of salvation for individuals. The plan is separated from the larger story = Quickie evangelism!	The gospel is the <i>full story</i> of <i>King Jesus</i> showing God’s rule & eventually reclaiming all that is, including responsive people.
Focus?	Me! The solitary individual. Conversion. Self remains at the center. “Me and Jesus.”	We! Community of Jesus Christ, being a faithful follower and ambassador. A de-centered self.
When?	The moment of decision, a datable point. Getting your ticket punched!	A life of discipleship, a long process with turning points, one of which is <i>born again</i> .
What saves?	The cross of Jesus, his atoning sacrifice for my sin for which his life was just preliminary.	The whole of Jesus’ life as climaxing in his cross and resurrection, ascension, reign, and return.
Church?	Nice, but not essential or necessary.	No salvation outside God’s people: new Israel.
Philosophy?	At home with American pragmatism (How?) and its love of techniques for outcomes.	The Triune God (Who?) is a holy mystery and not manipulated by human salvation techniques.
Persuasion?	Threats, heavy psychological pressure.	Evidences plus the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
Strengths?	Concise, elevator length. Teachability and easily turned into a tract or program (e.g. Evangelism Explosion, Four Spiritual Laws).	Comprehensive, as messy and complex as life. Requires the whole of Scripture, the Creeds, the Church, the Triune God.
Origin?	New: 19 th century revivalism and 20 th century American evangelicalism, especially decision oriented crusades and para-church ministries.	Old: The apostolic and patristic church (1-5th centuries), pre-Protestant, pre-Reformation.
Product?	Self-focused, unstable religious consumers.	Tough, resourceful, serving disciples.

