

Believing God

Romans 1:16-23

5/ 15/ 05

Intro

We now begin a study in one of the most powerful books of the Bible. It is one of the most powerful documents ever written. We think of great documents such as the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution of the United States, but these do not hold a candle to the power and influence that the letter to the Romans has had upon human history.

Augustine, the great theologian of the fourth century came to faith reading a few verses in chapter 13. **Martin Luther** began the great Protestant movement after reading verse 17 that “*the righteous will live by faith.*” **John Wesley** was reading Martin Luther’s commentary for the introduction of Romans and was touched by God so that the great awakening of the 18th century was born.

Paul wrote the letter to the Romans while he was on his third missionary journey sometime around 56-58 AD, almost 30 years after the resurrection of Christ. He wrote it while he was in the city of Corinth. You can get a sense of what was happening in the city of Corinth as you read through this letter.

At the time Paul wrote this letter he had never been to Rome. He had been longing to go there and had heard about what was happening there. In this letter he writes of some of the deepest and most profound spiritual truths that God has given us.

In the verses we are studying, Paul gives us great insights in one of the great themes of the letter – believing God.

These are insights Paul give us in believing God.

I. The Gospel Changes Lives

A. Don’t be ashamed of the gospel

- Right away we get theme that Paul writes; he is not ashamed of the good news of God.
- Why are some people ashamed of the gospel? Because they are afraid of people’s opinions. They don’t want to be ridiculed by non-believers.
- But we are too concerned about what God think more than what men think.

John 12:42-43, “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”

Mark 8:38, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”

Illus – in the old days, school used to use hall monitors and someone would get the privilege of carrying messages from the principle to the various teacher and would even get to interrupt class. He was not ashamed because he was carrying a letter from the principle.

- Don’t be ashamed of identifying with Jesus Christ. Who should be influencing who?

B. It is the power of God

- God's power is seen in many ways, but the most important demonstration of His power is the gospel.
- The "good word" of God is powerful and sharper than any two edged sword.

Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Jeremiah 23:29, "Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"

- The gospel is the instrument through which the Holy Spirit works.

C. To everyone who believes

- There is a part we have and that is in believing. But in believing the power of God is revealed and lives are changed.
- Why would be ashamed of the one thing that had the power to change lives?

Illus – Rome had great power, but it did not have the power to change lives. The philosopher Seneca called it, "the Great cesspool of iniquity." The writer Juvenal called it a "filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood."

Illus – God did ask men to behave and be saved, but to believe and be saved. Believing God opens the door of heaven into your heart and godly change is the result.

Romans 10:11, For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed."

II. The Righteous Will Live By Faith

A. The righteousness of God is revealed

- Paul is saying that *in the gospel*, the righteousness of God is revealed.
- The gospel answers the question, "How can a holy God forgive sin and still be holy?"
- In the death of Christ, God revealed His righteousness by punishing sin.
- In the resurrection, He revealed His righteousness by making His righteousness available to every believing sinner.

II Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Galatians 3:13-14, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" -- in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

B. From faith to faith

- The words, *from faith to faith*, mean that from the beginning to the end, the gospel reveals God's righteousness and is applied to us by faith and faith only.

Hebrews 12:1-2, Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

- God's righteousness is given in totality to the believer at the point of salvation. God's righteousness is given as a gift to everyone who believes – and this by faith alone.
- God's righteousness then must be lived by sinners who then grow in their living out the righteousness of God – and this by faith alone.

C. Faith is to be lived

- The statement, "*the just shall live by faith*" comes from Habakkuk 2:4 and is quoted three times in the New Testament.

Habakkuk 2:4, "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith."

- The righteous shall live by faith – by personally believing in Jesus Christ as God's answer to sin, we have eternal life.
- The righteous shall live by faith – by applying faith in everyday decisions (our words and our actions), we shall live out the righteousness we have been given.

Romans 14:22-23, "The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."

III. Live Out Your Believing in God

A. Some people live as if God didn't exist

- This verse must be seen as coming right after verse 17 – live by faith because many people live as if God didn't exist.
- "Ungodliness" is another word for "Godlessness." It doesn't mean that someone is an atheist; they may in fact believe in God, but they live as if God did not exist – they try their best to pretend that He doesn't exist.
- In other words, they disregard God – and the result is selfish and hurtful behavior, what you believe or don't believe ultimately will factor in how you live.

Illus – There is a conspiracy in our society not to mention God. You can't mention Him in our schools – teachers can't bring it up. The Ten Commandments are not to be seen in our courtrooms, and on and on.

Galatians 6:7-8, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

B. The truth of God is seen everywhere

- Some people want to suppress the truth of God.
- But the truth of God is breaking out everywhere.

Illus – Sometimes when I stop and consider the great things that God has done in nature, and I'm talking to a friend or one of our kids, I'll say, “And of course, all this came about by chance, everything came about by chance.” It's always worth a laugh.

Illus – we say that only intelligence and skill can build a watch, but hearts beat and babies grow, and eyes see all by chance. God must laugh at such nonsense!

Poem by Elizabeth Barret Browning: “Earth's crammed with heaven; and every common bush aflame with God. But only those who see take off their shoes; the rest sit around and pluck blackberries.”

Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

- The easiest thing to see in the universe is that God is there. You must work very hard to convince yourself that He is not there, and only the very intelligent are able to do it. The rest of us simply see and believe.
- Verse 22, “*Professing to be wise, they became fools,*”

Conclusion

The righteous live by their faith. If we believe that God exists, we should regard God in our living. If we believe that God exists, we need to understand how a holy God forgives sinners – and thank God every day for the answer.