

Romans 1:9-10 explains Paul's burden for these saints. He prayed for them "unceasingly," asking that God allow him to visit Rome. He was genuinely concerned about their welfare, longing to see them firmly "established" in the faith (Romans 1:11). I don't view the "spiritual gift" mentioned in Romans 1:11 as one of the spiritual gifts of Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, and Ephesians 4. I expect, rather, that Paul is referring to the spiritual growth that would occur in their lives as a result of his visit. On the heels of this thought, he makes an astounding statement. Paul, the mature man of God, declares that his time with the believers in Rome would serve to encourage them (Romans 1:12). Yes, a less mature believer can minister to the giants of the faith. We must never forget this reality!

Paul desired to bear "fruit" among the believers in Rome (Romans 1:13)—allow Jesus to bear "fruit" through him. Even though he had experienced difficulty in arranging a visit, he refused to give up the idea. In fact, in Romans 1:14-15 Paul mentions that he was "under obligation" when it came to preaching "the gospel"—which should explain his desire to visit his readers. "Under obligation" actually means "in debt." Thus, Paul viewed himself as a debtor while serving the church at Rome. Can you believe Paul's heart? Can you believe the calling the Lord had placed upon him to preach to the Gentiles? Read 1 Corinthians 9:16 for additional insight.

Romans 1:16-17 addresses Paul's view of "the gospel":

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 man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Romans 1:16-17)

Paul was "not ashamed" of what Jesus had accomplished through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (Romans 1:16). Why should he be ashamed of such good news? Today, many men who claim to proclaim truth water down "the gospel" in the presence of those who might take offense—or, worse yet, teach without openly disclosing what they believe regarding the more divisive theological matters of our day. What one believes always affects what one speaks. Thus, the listener has every right to know the teacher's theological bent before deciding to listen to that teacher. Paul was not "ashamed" of what he believed, nor did he attempt to conceal it with illogical assumptions adorned with excessive vocabulary designed to covertly sway his listener's beliefs—a common practice of our day. "The gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" and no other legitimate "gospel" exists (Galatians 1:8-10). The gospel of Christ was and is the only gospel with the power to transform lives. Being an eloquent speaker is not a requirement for communicating the gospel's profundity:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that

your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.
(1Corinthians 2:1-5)

Paul was not impressed with man's natural abilities but with God's ability to communicate through mortal servants.

The reason the world is ashamed of the gospel is given in 1Corinthians 1:18:

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1Corinthians 1:18)

The fact that God would die for the sin of the world is "*foolishness,*" or folly, to the lost—as long as they reject Christ's perfect work. However, when they realize (in their depravity) that they are sinners the gospel becomes magnificent news to them. We must never forget this reality, especially while enduring scorn or ridicule from the lost. In fact, our greatest enemy today may become our most treasured comrade tomorrow. I am grateful for those who exemplified godly lives before me while I lived as an unbeliever. They were extremely offensive to me before I submitted to the Lord, but their willingness to risk the friendship for the sake of the truth spoke volumes concerning their courage and faith. I have since thanked them for loving me enough to demonstrate the more excellent way.

Paul uses the phrase, "*to the Jew first and also to the Greek*" in Romans 1:16. When Paul entered a city he had not previously visited, he preferred preaching in the Jewish synagogue first (as is evidenced by the book of Acts). He believed that the gospel should be presented "*to the Jew first*" and then "*to the Greek*" (Gentiles). What had affected his thinking? The Law was given "*to the Jew first*" in Exodus 20. Also, our Lord instructed His disciples to preach "*to all the nations,*" but to begin in "*Jerusalem,*" the city of the Jews (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8).

Paul realized, too, that "*the righteousness of God*" is "*revealed*" in the gospel (Romans 1:17) through the cross of Christ. God is holy; He will have nothing to do with sin, and must always judge sin. Man is unholy in his spiritually unregenerated state, inundated with sin—but capable of exercising personal repentance and faith. A just act took place on the cross, for sin was judged through the perfect God-man, Jesus Christ. Because "*righteousness*" means to be right, the Father's rightness was "*revealed*" when He judged sin through His sinless Son. Consequently, the gospel demonstrates "*the righteousness [the rightness] of God.*"

The last phrase of Romans 1:17, which is taken from Habakkuk 2:4, could easily be the theme of this epistle:

... "*But the righteous man shall live by faith.*" (Romans 1:17)

You would do well to memorize this phrase, for its rock-solid truth sums up the book of Romans and is dealt with quite often—especially the terms "*righteous,*" "*live,*" and "*faith.*" Paul repeatedly emphasizes that God gives "*righteousness*" to only one group of people—to those who exercise personal repentance and faith while depraved. God not only makes the depraved, repentant sinner "*new*" (2Corinthians 5:17 KJV), but also allows him to "*live*" spiritually due to having accepted Jesus through "*faith.*"

Romans 1:18-32 explains the progression of sin in man, for the heathen is condemned in these passages. This section of Romans proves that a Godless society will self-destruct, so we will examine these verses in great depth.

Paul first states “*the wrath of God is revealed...against all ...who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*” (Romans 1:18).

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,
(Romans 1:18)

The depraved who reject Christ receive “*the wrath of God*,” not the depraved who choose to repent and believe and experience God’s salvation. Because “*suppress*” can also be interpreted “hold” or “possess,” those who reject Christ have access to the truth. After all, you can never “*suppress*” what is unavailable to you. Romans 1:19 confirms our findings:

because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (Romans 1:19 NASB)

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. (Romans 1:19 KJV)

Even the English Standard Version renders the passage:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (Romans 1:19 ESV)

The lost have opportunity to know “*about God*” in the midst of their depravity, for the individuals addressed here choose to disregard the obvious. God’s “*eternal power and divine nature...have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made*” in the physical realm. As a result, “*they are without excuse*”:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

Paul’s point is that the depraved who reject God’s truth will have no “*excuse*” for not believing, for He has revealed Himself “*through what has been made.*” Some reject His offer of salvation choosing instead to “*suppress the truth*” through living “*in unrighteousness*” (Romans 1:18). You can’t “*suppress*” what is not accessible, confirming that the depraved have every opportunity to know and believe the truth.

Be careful with verse 21. The phrase, “*For even though they knew God*,” does not mean that they “*knew*” Him as a result of exercising repentance and faith while depraved and receiving God’s salvation. It means only that they knew about Him through His

disclosure of the truth in visible creation and what was “*evident within them*” (verses 19-20).

We also find that the hearts of the depraved who “*did not honor Him as God*” were “*darkened*” more extensively as they progressed in sin (Romans 1:21).

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21)

This verse is another encumbrance for those who perceive the depraved as incapable of recognizing their need for a Savior and exercising repentance and faith. How could “*their foolish heart*” be “*darkened*” more extensively if they are, as some people incorrectly assume, born a spiritual corpse? A corpse is as dead as dead can be—it cannot experience additional deadness. Yet the word “*darkened*” is in the passive voice in the Greek, meaning that the subject is being acted upon by an outside source—the source being the powers of darkness. Consequently, this verse proves that man is not as spiritually “*darkened*” at physical birth as some might believe. We were not born spiritual corpses.

The fruit of a “*darkened...heart*” is mentioned in verses 22-23:

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:22-23)

Those who profess “*to be wise*” become “*fools.*” God honors humility—never pride. He, in fact, opposes “*the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6). “*Every knee*” will “*bow*” and “*every tongue*” will “*confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,*” including those who reject Him and experience His condemnation (Philippians 2:10-11). The fool won’t win, no matter how wise he professes to be in the realm of the natural. Paul verifies this fact in the following passages:

For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1Corinthians 1:19-20)

Those who become “*fools,*” due to “*Professing to be wise*” (Romans 1:22), are irrational enough to exchange “*the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures*” (Romans 1:23). God classifies such behavior as “*idolatry*”:

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (Colossians 3:5)

The “glory” (Romans 1:23) they exchange is the physical manifestation of God’s presence, which in the Scriptures is displayed in the form of fire, smoke, clouds, thunder, lightning, and the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ.

God’s glory appeared to Moses in a burning bush in Exodus 3:2, to Israel in Exodus 19:16-18 and 20:18-19, and entered the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34-35. It led Israel throughout the forty years of wilderness wanderings (Exodus 40:36-38), entered King Solomon’s temple (2Chronicles 5:13-14; 7:1-3), returned to heaven in Ezekiel’s day (Ezekiel 9-11), and remained there for approximately six hundred years. It returned to earth at Jesus’ First Coming, appearing to the shepherds in Luke 2:8-9; for Jesus, the Son of God, is the “...glory as of the only begotten from the Father...” (John 1:14). “Glory,” in the form of a “cloud,” “received Him” back into heaven subsequent to His resurrection (Acts 1:9; 1Timothy 3:16). God’s glory was also manifested on the day of Pentecost when “tongues as of fire...rested” on the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:3). This same “glory” dwells inside all New Testament believers (Colossians 1:27); for Jesus, the “glory” of God (John 1:14), “lives” inside them (Galatians 2:20). Therefore, this glory is manifested as we yield to His indwelling presence, making life the most fulfilling journey imaginable. Paul verifies these truths while writing to the church at Corinth:

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; (2Corinthians 4:6-7)

For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2Corinthians 4:11)

When the Rapture occurs, all church saints (those who are on the earth as well as those who have experienced physical death and dwell in heaven) will receive their resurrected bodies and “be caught up...in the clouds” (1Thessalonians 4:16-17)—meaning they will be “caught up” in glory. The church will also return with Christ in “glory” at His Second Coming (Colossians 3:4).

This same “glory” appeared on Moses’ “face” as he returned from the Mount on which he received the Law:

But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, (2Corinthians 3:7)

“...the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses...,” confirms that the Law cannot bring a person into a place of intimacy with God. The “glory of his face” was “fading,” verifies that the new covenant of grace would replace the old covenant of Law. This subject is addressed in the book of Hebrews, with the pronoun “He” pointing to Jesus:

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. (Hebrews 8:6-7)

New Testament believers are not under Law, as validated by Paul's words in Romans 6:14:

...for you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

Without question, the "glory" is a fascinating subject! The fact that it lives in us through the Person of Christ (Colossians 1:27) should forever encourage us! Is it not amazing that anyone would exchange this glory for the shallowness of worshipping the creature?

As we continue, realize that God loves the lost as well as the saved:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

God loves the liar, the thief, the fornicator, the adulterer, the homosexual, the lesbian, and even the reprobate. In fact, He loves them so much that He will give them over to their desires; He would never force individuals to submit to His will by removing their freedom of choice. As we address the progression of sin in man, know that the Father loves those who participate in the deeds of darkness. In fact, He would welcome them with open arms should they choose to repent and accept His Son as Savior.

God gives man over to man's own desires when man rejects truth, as is validated by Old and New Testament Scripture:

"But My people did not listen to My voice; and Israel did not obey Me. "So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices. (Psalm 81:11-12)

"And at that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; ... (Acts 7:41-42)