

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Romans 1:8-17

There are 31,189 verses in the Bible. 31,189! The very middle verse of the Bible, the one in the exact center, is the 9th verse of Psalm 118. And, not only is this verse physically in the exact center of the Bible; it is also spiritually in the exact center of the Bible. It is the central issue of all scripture. Psalm 118:9 says, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."

If you put your faith in men, they will betray you. But God will never betray you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. When Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he rejoiced over their faith in God. Romans 1:8-17:

8. "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."

True faith is very simple. But it's more than just believing God's word. It's believing God's word and acting on it. Suppose you pick up a telephone and call United Airlines. When the clerk answers, you ask what time Flight 295 leaves for San Francisco. And, on the basis of the word of a clerk whom you've never met, you pack your bags and drive to the airport.

Faith in God is just as simple. I'm a hopeless and helpless sinner. God tells me in His word that He sent Jesus to die for sinners. I am in debt to God but God says that He has paid the debt and all I have to do is believe His word about it. All I have to do is lean my full weight upon Him!

Paul continues:

9. "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;"

Paul prayed regularly for the Christians in Rome. In the same way, I pray for you regularly. As I sit down to prepare these messages; ~~during the regular Wednesday night prayer meetings at our church;~~ and at other times from day-to-day, "without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers."

Paul's statement back in verse eight, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all," is a prayer in itself. And it was a true, real, and effectual prayer because it

came to the Father through Jesus Christ. Note the wording again: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ." The prayer was made to God through Jesus Christ. This is the only way a prayer ever gets through to God: through Jesus Christ. I Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Jesus is the only mediator we have with God; he is the only way that prayers can get to the Father.

Now, it is true that God hears certain prayers from anybody and everybody. God hears the prayer, "Lord Jesus, Please save me and be the Lord of my life," no matter who prays it. He heard it from me before I was a Christian, and it's only because he heard it that I am a Christian today.

But, in general, it is true that God does not hear the prayer of anyone who is not a Christian. This is not something I made up. This is what Jesus himself said. In John 14:6, He made it very blunt, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Acts 4:12 also emphasizes this point, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Prayer is worthless and useless unless it conforms to God's rules for prayer. God's rule is that all prayer must come through Jesus Christ in order to get to him. No other prayer makes it. God's rules for prayer are just as strict and just as rigid as a bank's rules for cashing checks. To say, "I believe in prayer" means no more than to say, "I believe in cashing checks." Do you have any money in the bank on which you can draw a check? If you don't, the check will bounce. In the same way, you must ask whether you have a deposit of saving faith with Almighty God through the death of His Son. If not, you can be certain that your prayer will bounce right off the ceiling and never get to God.

Paul goes on: ¹⁰⁻¹³

10. "Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you."

11. "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;"

12. "That is, that I may be comforted together with you

by the mutual faith both of you and me."

13. "Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles."

I know how Paul felt. Coming here to be with you is a high-point in my week. It is a special joy for me to bring you messages from God's word that can strengthen you in His love. And, seeing your love for Jesus, strengthens and refreshes me too!

Paul continues, and writes about his own stewardship as an apostle. He says three things about himself in this next passage. He says, "I am debtor," "I am ready," and "I am not ashamed." Verses 14 through 16:

14. "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."

15. "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."

16. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

He said he was a debtor to the entire world. He said he was ready, meaning both by background and education and by the purpose and calling of God: ready to preach the gospel to them. And, he said that he was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

If you draw a white chalk circle on the floor and put a goose in the circle, the goose will not cross the line. The goose will starve to death before crossing the line; even with food in plain sight just outside the circle. But we are not geese that we should allow fear to outweigh our trust in God.

The reason that we must not be ashamed of the gospel is the same as Paul's reason for not being ashamed of it. It is the same as Paul's reason and purpose for writing this letter to the Romans:

17. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed

from faith to faith: as it is written. The just shall live by faith."

Romans 1:17 says that God's righteousness is "revealed from faith to faith." The Greek is ek pisteos eis pistin which literally translates as "out of faith and into faith." This is the glorious statement of God's method in the world today. He does not speak to us directly from Heaven. Instead, He comes out of the faith of one heart and into the faith of another. One man preaches and another man believes.

No-one has ever been saved except through the instrumentality of another person who first set forth the gospel to them. Maybe no-one was present when you actually took the step of faith, but someone had surely planted the seed earlier. Even Paul, who was converted through the direct revelation of Jesus Christ from Heaven on the Damascus Road, had already heard Stephen preach the gospel, in front of the Sanhedrin, on the day they stoned him to death.

You are Christ's Ambassador to a lost and despairing world. If you don't allow Christ to use you to tell others about the gospel, there is no other way for them to hear. At the same time, you mustn't feel unworthy if God has not used you to speak directly to another. Those who God uses to support others with prayer and substance in their ministries are just as needed as the one who actually speaks the word.

Have you ever spoken with a member of the Gideons? Some of you may have, others may not have. The Bibles that the Gideons place in hotel rooms speak with thunder in their stead, and the Gideons are powerfully used by God even without spoken words. In Matthew 10:42, Jesus said, "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only ... shall in no wise lose his reward." And Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name ..."

He 2:4 "The just shall live by faith." These six words altered the course of history and made the Protestant Reformation. Make no mistake. This is the word of God, and the word of God is truth. The just shall live by faith! And, what is faith? Great theology and great theologians have argued and agonized for centuries over the proper definition of faith, and still haven't come up with a fully adequate and

comprehensive definition. And yet, every little child knows what faith is. They know what is meant by faith in loving parents even though they can't put it into words. They know what is meant by faith in a promise. True faith contains everything that the mind can bring of assent, everything that the heart can bring of love, confidence, and trust, and everything that the will can bring of obedience.

Without Christ, we are dead already. When Adam sinned in the Garden, spiritual death fell upon the entire human race. Just as physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body, so spiritual death is the separation of the soul and spirit from God! We come out of spiritual death and into spiritual life when God declares us just through faith in Jesus Christ. The just shall live by faith. We continue to live in moment-by-moment victory as we remain yielded to Him in faith.

Hallelujah! Amen!

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