

## ROMANS III

### The Just Shall Live By Faith: The Heart of Romans

Romans 1:8-17

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#### INTRODUCTION:

The gospel is not faith, but the gospel cannot be understood or appropriated apart from a living and evangelical faith. As the Westminster confession puts it, the faith that justifies is “no dead faith” (II.2). Another name for “not dead” is alive, or living. The gospel is objective and outside of us. But the beating heart of Romans is the centrality of a living faith, the only kind of faith that ever believed God for anything.

#### THE TEXT:

*“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 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; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. 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 am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. 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. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:8-17).*

#### SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

The church at Rome was not an insignificant body. Their faith was spoken of throughout the entire world (v. 8). Although Paul was not connected to that church formally, he nevertheless lifted them up to God unceasingly (v. 9). This point was important enough for Paul to swear to (v. 9). He served God in his spirit in the gospel of the Son (v. 9). In his prayers, one of his requests was that he be able in the will of God to make to Rome to visit them (v. 10). He had a deep desire to be a blessing to the Romans (v. 11). But, he hastens to add, this edification would by no means be a one way street (v. 12). He wanted them to know that he had attempted to come many times, wanting some fruit there in Rome just as he had been fruitful among other Gentiles (v. 13). Paul saw himself under obligation both to the Greeks (where much of his work had been done) and to the barbarians (in Spain perhaps?). His obligations were to the wise and unwise, to those in the seats of power and those in the hinterlands (v. 14). So as far as Paul’s strength is concerned, he is prepared to spend it in Rome (v. 15). Why? Because he is not ashamed of the gospel (v. 16) he serves (v. 9). This gospel is not shameful, and is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes—to the Jew first, then the Greeks, and then the barbarians (v. 16). For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith (v. 17). Scripture teaches us this—the just shall live by faith (v. 17; Hab. 2:1-5).

#### MUTUAL SUPPORT:

Remember the point of the book of Romans—Paul is looking for the Romans to help him in his mission to Spain. But he does not simply use them in pragmatic way. If they are going to be his partners in this work, he wants to meet them first. He does not want to minister in Spain with their support unless he has first ministered to them. And neither does he want to minister in Spain with their support unless they have been a blessing to him. In short, he is not just after their money. All biblical giving occurs in the context of communion and fellowship. It is no impersonal, bureaucratic affair.

## THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH:

The phrase that Paul introduces here is taken from the minor prophet Habakkuk (2:4). This is the first quotation from the Old Testament in an epistle saturated with such quotations. And it is not just a phrase taken at random. The entire book of Habakkuk is a chiasm, and this verse that Paul cites is from the center of the chiasm. It is the central point of that book—and the central point in this one.

A Habakkuk complains about how long he must wait for justice (1:2-4)

B Yahweh answers him by describing the arrival of the incredibly powerful Babylonians (1:5-11)

C Habakkuk complains a second time—why do you allow the wicked to destroy nations more righteous than they (1:12-17)?

D Wait patiently. The wicked will be die, and *the righteous will live by faith* (2:1-5).

C' Yahweh answers the second complaint; everything will be put right (2:6-20).

B' Yahweh gives a final answer; His army is far more powerful than the Babylonians (3:1-15).

A' Habakkuk resolves his first complaint. He will wait for God's salvation (3:16-19).

The point of Habakkuk is to urge believers to a patient and tenacious faith in the face of incredible adversity. The context makes it clear that this is not raw propositional assent. Connected to this, the word rendered *faith* here (*emunah*) means faithfulness or fidelity. This is not “justification by works,” but rather “justification by faith that lives.” The fidelity is not fidelity in works, but rather fidelity to itself, to the true nature of faith.

## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD:

Paul says here that in the gospel “the righteousness of God” is revealed. What does that mean? I have mentioned the New Perspective on Paul, and one of the things emphasized in that theology is that the righteousness of God refers to His covenant faithfulness in keeping His promises, and not to an imputed righteousness—the righteousness of Christ credited to the one who believes. To take it in this latter sense, as we must, does not mean that we are denying that God is righteous Himself, and is a faithful, covenant keeping God. That is also true. But notice what Paul is claiming here. The just shall live by faith, meaning that the just shall live *from* faith *to* faith. This faith is what reveals or manifests the righteousness of God. And if we come at it from the other direction and say that God has kept His promises righteously, we have to ask what those promises are. And the answer to that is that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. He is the one who became the last Adam so that many might be made righteous (Rom. 5:19).

## NOT ASHAMED:

This gospel is potent indeed. When we are ashamed of the gospel, it is either because we have not reflected on how powerful it is, or it is because we have tinkered with it, thinking to improve things, and have only succeeded in creating something to be ashamed of.



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