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Romans

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Romans 1:17

Today's verse contains a statement which will define the entire structure of the epistle and, yes, even the Bible itself. To introduce it, Paul says "for" which is given to explain what he had just said. It cannot be missed though that the next verse also includes the word "for." In other words, Verse 17 will explain what he has already said to the church in Rome (and thus to us) and then the discourse on the nature of God and our relationship to Him starting in verse 18 will explain what he says in this verse.

Paul is thinking clearly and presenting his argument in a logical order. Therefore, when he speaks about issues which are contrary to God's nature and worthy of condemnation in his coming thoughts, there is a direct connection to today's verse. The statement of such great weight and magnitude is "the righteousness of God." There are many theories about what this is speaking of.

- 1) Is it speaking of His innate righteousness? "I Am Who I Am and therefore my traits such as righteousness define Me."
- 2) Is it speaking of His goodness? The righteousness of God is defined by His benevolent nature.

- 3) Is it speaking of His mode and means of justifying fallen man? God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel which contains the path to justification and thus our own declaration of righteousness.
- 4) Etc.

The answer is that the "righteousness of God" Paul is speaking about is the gospel. God's righteousness is an innate righteousness and one doesn't need the Bible to understand this even though the Bible does proclaim it. God is benevolent and forgiving as is evidenced in nature, such as in rains falling on all people whether they are good or bad. His benevolent nature is also seen in the Bible such as in the giving of prophets to again and again call His people to repentance. But these don't get at the heart of why Paul was willing to expend himself (verse 17). Rather, he explains that it is the gospel message to which his efforts were directed.

The "righteousness of God" is the act contained in the gospel – "For in it...is revealed." And then he explains the very heart and core of that gospel – it is "from faith to faith." The gospel is the way in which God's innate righteousness is transferred to fallen man so that he stands justified and forgiven for any and all of his transgressions, both inherited through Adam and actively committed in the flesh. And this gospel is based solely on faith.

In order to set this thought into motion, he cites the Scriptures "for it is written." Paul's entire discourse explaining this righteousness will be based on a verse which comes from the time of the law and which was written by a prophet who lived under the law – "The just shall live by faith." This quote comes from the prophet Habakkuk –

"Behold the proud,
His soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his faith."

Habakkuk 2:4

Habakkuk, under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells the people under the law (the obedience to its precepts are not of faith, but of deeds) that those who are just shall live by faith. From this one verse, Paul will lay out the “righteousness of God” as has been displayed in and through Jesus Christ. But he won’t start there. Instead, he will start with God’s natural revelation of Himself and logically proceed from that springboard all the way through to his final thoughts.

He is doing this to show us that in any place and in any time and to any person – whether they have the law or not or whether they have heard the gospel or not, God is just in the decisions He renders. No one can say, “I didn’t know” and no one can say “God is unfair.” In the end, we don’t need Jesus to go to hell, we are heading there already. Rather, we need Jesus to be saved from hell. Paul will detail this very clearly as we continue through Romans.

Life application – Are you living by faith in what God has presented in the Bible about Jesus fulfilling the law on our behalf, or are you attempting to be justified by some act or acts which are prescribed in the law, such as not eating pork or not getting a tattoo? Have faith that Jesus can and will save you when you call on Him.