

A Word of Gospel-Saturated Thanksgiving

Romans 1:8–17

What do you give thanks for?

What does Paul give thanks for?

What is the Context?

Before: This is the second part of Paul's introduction. The first (vv. 1–7) introduces Paul and his gospel; the second introduces his gospel intentions (prayer, pursuit, preaching).

After: These verses conclude by declaring the gospel's power to save and Paul's confidence in the gospel. This sets up the beginning of Paul's outline of the gospel.

Within: Both sections land on the theme of faith (v. 13 and 17). This sets up the importance of faith in this book.

What is the Structure?

vv. 8–12 Paul gives thanks for God's work in the Romans lives

And he longs to see them . . . that they may encourage one another's faith

vv. 13–17 Paul explains why he hasn't seen them . . . but that he's planning to come

And he's not ashamed of the gospel for it is (1) the power of God, (2) the righteousness of God, and (3) the source of faith

This is the longest word of thanksgiving in any of his letters . . .

The reason seems to be related to the passion of Paul's heart

Paul's Thanksgiving Leads Him to Prayer and Pursuit (vv. 8–10)

1. I thank my God . . . for your faith
2. I mention you in my prayers
3. Asking that . . . I may now succeed in coming to you . . . WHY
4. I long to see you . . .
5. That I may impart some spiritual gift
6. **That our faith may be built up together**

Paul's Desire to Preach the Gospel Comes from His Confidence in the Gospel (vv. 13–17)

1. I do not want you to be unaware = want you to know
2. I have intended to come to you
3. I long to reap some spiritual harvest
4. I am a debtor
5. I am eager to preach the gospel
6. I am not ashamed of the gospel
7. **FOR . . . in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith**

Is Paul being self-centered with all of these first person verbs?

1. There is a place to express personal desires . . . intro of the letter is the place
2. His desires are for the good of others . . . He's not prattling on about himself
3. His desire for a spiritual harvest . . . is for their good
4. His words make him a debtor to them . . .
5. The goal is mutual edification – v. 12, 17
6. **Anything else??**

Verse 8:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

What is he thanking God for??

Traditionally this part of a letter was concerned with the health and well-being of the recipients, but in this case it is concerned with their faith.¹

Faith is what he gives thanks for!

What would happen if you filled your prayers with thanksgiving for others faith?

Is our thanksgiving weak because we overlook the faith of others?

OR . . . are our relationship shallow because we don't give thanks like this?

1 Thessalonians 2:13: And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

What does it mean for their faith to be proclaimed in all the world?

How does the faith of one church bless another church?

How might a church / our church bless others with our faith?

¹ Kruse, C. G. (2012). [*Paul's Letter to the Romans*](#). 58–59.

Verse 9–10

⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

What is the word that connects v. 8 and v. 9?

What is the relationship between Paul's thanksgiving and his prayer?

He longs to visit them . . . his thanksgiving impels him to be with them.

How applicable this is in our families / church – thanksgiving impels us towards others.

Paul says he “**serves with my Spirit.**”

The word “serve” has the idea of worship – Paul' service is an expression of worship.

He will use the word again in 1:25 and 12:1–2 (cf. Phil. 3:3)

Romans 1:25 – ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and **served** the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

As Bob Dylan . . . everybody serves somebody – Paul is serving God

Romans 12:1–2 – ¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Philippians 3:3 – ³ For we are the circumcision, who **worship** by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

We can only worship truly, when we have received the gospel in the power of the Spirit.

Therefore, while the ESV speaks of Paul serving in his spirit, it is just as likely, he is speaking of the Spirit's power – cf. Romans 8:1–11

Assuming this reading (empowered by the Spirit) – what difference does this make?

Colossians 1:24–29

“Mr Spurgeon . . . how do you do what you do. You forget there are two of us”

Anything else to take away from this?

What about God's will – how often we think we know God's will and pray for him to our bidding . . . but Paul submits to God's will. – cf. **Acts 16:6–10 . . . Acts 25:9–12; 28:16**

Verses 11–12

¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

What kind of gift do you suppose he's getting at? And better . . . how would you know?

1. Could it be prophecy, tongues, teaching

This is most unlikely, for in Paul's writings the one who imparts such spiritual gifts is never Paul, or any other human being, but always God (the Holy Spirit) (cf. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:1–4, 7–11, 28²)

2. Apostle's understanding of the gospel

Maybe

3. The gift or its effect seems to faith

How do we know?

Verse 12 completes verse 11.

But he changes gears – he's writing to believers; he's not just going to give, he's also going to receive.

This is an important principle in missions . . .

Woe to us . . . if we ever think that we are the sole benefactors of blessing.

Missions is a two way street . . . we don't just go, give, serve . . . we also receive.

Similarly . . . in any service you do, you will be blessed. You may be tired, but you will also be encouraged when you are doing the work of the Lord.

² Kruse, C. G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 62.

Verses 13–15

¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

What stands out to you here?

- He stresses his interest in coming again, but also the fact that he has been hindered.
- He longs to reap a harvest – whatever that means.
- He is under obligation – i.e., he is a debtor to the church at Rome
- He is eager to preach the gospel in Rome

What does it mean to reap a harvest?

Is he speaking to believers or unbelievers?

How do you reap a harvest among believers?

- He's not talking about new converts . . . so much as he is growing and maturing disciples
 - The fruit of the Spirit glorifies God
 - The fruit of the Spirit also feeds others
 - The fruit of the Spirit also convinces others of gospel
- There's something else – Paul's joy is in seeing people believe and grow in the gospel. His joy is impelling him to come to Rome and preach the gospel. **Cf. Philippians 1:22**

How can Paul be a debtor to people he's never met?

- When you receive the gospel it is not just for you . . . God has given you a gift to share
- What would happen if you took seriously the principle of stewardship
- How can you grow in your burden to share? – Read Romans . . . Romans 9:1–6

Why is Paul eager to preach the gospel?

1. Spiritual harvest
2. Debtor
3. The Power of the Gospel

Which is most influential?

Romans 1:16–17

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

1. I am not ashamed
2. The power of God for salvation
3. To the Jew first and also the Greek
4. In the Gospel . . . the righteousness of God is revealed
5. From faith for/to faith
6. As it is written . . . the righteous shall live by faith

[1] Ashamed?

1. Standard rhetorical device . . .
2. Standing the Gospel up against the Roman world

We know that belief in a crucified man was foolish to the Jews and the Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Paul affirms that he is not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation

[2] Power of God

1. What is powerful about the gospel?

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on **God’s power**. (1 Cor. 2:4–5)

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, **with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction**. (1 Thess. 1:4–5)

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, **the word of God**, which is indeed at work in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13)

2. Is the gospel powerful for everyone?

Only those who believe . . .

Hence, Paul does everything to make faith rest on God’s power – not his persuasion.

He preaches the Gospel in Rome, because he knows this is what will change people.

How does / should this inform the way we do ministry?

[3] To the Jew first . . .

1. What does this mean?

2. Do we find any verses that support this chronology?

Romans 3:1–2; 9:4–5

Ephesians 1:13–14

3. Why is chronology a better word than priority?

Because God’s plan was always for the world – first in time to the Jews, then from the Jews to the whole world.

Acts follows this pattern – “On three occasions Luke reports that when the local Jewish community as a whole rejected the message, Paul informed them that he had first to preach the gospel to them, but seeing they had rejected it, he would turn to the Gentiles (Acts. 13:46–47; 18:16; 28:24–29).”³

4. Is there anything that teaches against “to the Jew first”?

Isaiah 19:23–25 – ²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. ²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”

Acts 19

Romans 11:13–14

³ Kruse, C. G. (2012). [*Paul’s Letter to the Romans*](#), 68–69.

[4] The Righteousness of God

1. What does this righteousness mean?

Martin Luther – From righteousness as God’s judgment to righteousness as God’s gift.

More Completely – The whole book of Romans speaks of R. 34x in 29 verses.

Options for Righteousness in Romans (Five Ways by Colin Kruse, pp. 79–80)

First, God’s righteousness as *distributive justice* is implied in 1:18–32, where he says that God recompenses humanity in accordance with its response to his revelation, and also in 2:2–11, where he says that God renders to all people according to their works—those who with patience and well-doing seek immortality will be rewarded with eternal life, while those who are factious and do not obey the truth will be punished with wrath and fury. . . .

Second, God’s righteousness as *covenant faithfulness* is defended in 3:3–9, where Paul argues that when God judges Israel it is not evidence of a failure of covenant loyalty on his part, but of sinfulness on Israel’s part. . . .

Third, God’s righteousness as *saving action* is expounded in 3:21–26. Here God’s righteousness is manifested, apart from the law, by providing redemption through Christ’s death, so making possible a righteousness (a right standing before God) to be received by faith. . . .

Fourth, God’s righteousness as *the gift of justification and a right relationship* with himself, already foreshadowed in 3:21–26, is expounded in terms of the experience of Abraham in 4:1–25. . . .

Fifth, the righteousness of God (as a gift) which leads to *righteousness of life* in believers is expounded in 6:1–23 (esp. vv. 16–18), where Paul points out that those who are under [the] grace [of justification] are no longer slaves of sin but are slaves of righteousness. . . .

All these aspects of God’s righteousness can be included under the one umbrella idea of *God acting in accordance with his own nature for the sake of his name*. Understood in this way, it can include God’s distributive justice, his covenant loyalty, his saving action, and his gift of justification leading to righteousness of life. . . .

Which one in Romans 1:17?

The saving actions of God . . . which produces a right standing with God.

This is the gift righteousness that Luther speaks about, but it also recognizes God’s covenant faithfulness . . . **to act righteously towards his promises.**

The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (Ps. 98:2–3)

My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. (Isa. 51:5)

[5] From faith . . . to faith

There has been a wide variety of interpretations here . . .

In a recent article, Charles Quarles lists the following interpretations of the expression, 'from faith to faith':

(i) from faith in the law to faith in the gospel (Tertullian);

(ii) from faith in the prophets to faith in the gospel (Theodoret; similarly Origen);

(iii) from the faith of OT saints to the faith of NT believers (Chrysostom);

(iv) from the faith of the gospel preachers to the faith of those who respond to it (Augustine);

(v) from God's faithfulness to man's faith (Ambrosiaster, adopted by Barth; similarly Dunn);

(vi) either from present faith to future faith, or from faith in the unseen realities to faith in realities actually possessed (Aquinas);

(vii) faith that advances and grows (Calvin; similarly Sanday and Headlam, Lagrange);

(viii) by faith and faith alone, that is, regarding 'from faith to faith' as an idiom of emphasis (Lietzmann, Nygren, Cranfield, Ziesler, Moo, Byrne, Fitzmyer, Schreiner);

(ix) by faith to those who believe (Cornely, Hill, Murray);

(x) faith as the ground and goal (Lightfoot). To these may be added the suggestion of Waetjen that 'from faith to faith' means out of the trust (fund) of Abraham into the trust (fund) of Christ, that is, the 'trust funds' established by God on the one hand by his covenant with Abraham and on the other hand by the new covenant in Christ.⁴

How do we decide?⁵

[1] How was this construction used – "from A to A"??

1. Not emphasis

The 'from-to' prepositional series 'often expresses range, duration, repletion, source and destination, previous state and new state or progression. It does not appear to function as an idiom of emphasis

2. Never different in substance – cf. 2 Cor 3:18 – from one degree of glory to another

3. Most likely a "progress in faith" (John Taylor) – but not just individual growth, but globally

[2] What is the context?

From Jew to Gentile . . .

⁴ Kruse, C. G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, pp. 75–76.

⁵ Kruse, C. G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, p. 77.

[6] As it is written . . . the righteous shall live by faith

This verse functions as ground for all that Paul says.⁶

MT

the righteous will live by *his* faith

The faithfulness of the righteous person

LXX

the righteous shall live by *my* faithfulness

the righteous shall live by my [God's] F.

OR

the righteous shall live by his faith in me

Uses of Habakkuk

Rom 1:17

the righteous will live by faith

Gal. 3:11

the righteous will live by faith

Heb. 10:38

my righteous one will live by faith⁷

Colin Kruse:

If we allow Paul's use of Habakkuk 2:4 in Galatians 3:11 to influence our interpretation of Romans 1:17, there is a *prima facie* case for interpreting it in this context also as a proof text for justification by faith.⁸

Why does getting this verse correctly matter so much?

Ultimately, the answer will come from what comes next . . . Romans 1:18–3:30

But for now . . . we can give thanks for the salvation that comes by faith . . . and for the faith that God is giving to people all over the world!

⁶ Kruse, C. G. (2012). [Paul's Letter to the Romans](#), p. 72.

⁷ Kruse, C. G. (2012). [Paul's Letter to the Romans](#), p. 73.

⁸ Kruse, C. G. (2012). [Paul's Letter to the Romans](#), pp. 73–74.