

## **From Faith to Faith? Examining Romans 1:16-17**

In the introduction of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul makes a statement that is difficult to understand. What does it mean, “for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith”?

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 one will live by faith.” (Rom 1:16-17)

To begin understanding this challenging phrase, two nouns, righteousness and faith, need to be defined.

Righteousness, or uprightness, describes the rightness of making decisions in accordance to God’s moral / legal standard. It is a determination made by God alone and describes the moral quality of a person. Implied in this understanding of righteousness is that God’s moral standard and basis of judgment of a person’s quality is objective and absolute; it cannot be capricious or a discretionary whim. Also rooted and embedded internally in His character, God’s moral standard cannot be external or higher in authority than Himself. Thus the moral standard that God judges by is based on His character and nature; it is fixed, absolute and timeless.

For God, it is the keeping of His divine covenant (Rom 3:4-5, 21-26).

For Jesus Christ, it is fulfilling His Father’s covenant promises and going through with the crucifixion and atonement for mankind’s sin (Isa 53:8-11; 2 Cor 5:21). And this fulfillment of God’s word was not limited to salvation, but also included Judgment (Rev 19:11).

When used of Old Testament Believers, faith in God determined if one was righteous (Rom 4:1-8).

When used for New Testament Believers, it is having faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:8-11) and abiding in God’s word (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Faith is the firm belief that God is really alive and truly exists, which engenders a trust and obedience in His words (Ex 19:4-6). In the Old Testament, the Exodus was the demonstration of God’s real presence. In the New Testament, God’s provision of His Son was the demonstration of His real presence. All that Jesus Christ said and did on earth was at the direction of His Father (John 5:19-23, 30; 6:38).

Paul clearly indicates that faith, the trusting belief in God and His promises are true, whether Old Testament or New Testament, is the basis of determining if one is righteous or not (Gal 3:6-9).

Righteousness is the determination that would make one acceptable to God. Under the New Covenant, to be free of the consequences of sin, one had to have, imputed on him, the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21-26).

The next step in understanding the phrase “for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith,” is evaluating the context of Paul’s introduction to the church in Rome comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul begins with the “gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David” (Rom 1:1-3). Paul indicates that the gospel message preceded the birth of Jesus.

Shortly after Mary’s purification (41 days after birth), the Holy Spirit reveals to Simeon that the infant Jesus was the prophesized Messiah. However, instead of identifying Jesus as the Messiah, Simeon states, “my eyes have seen Your salvation,” and alludes to several prophetic passages from Isaiah. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s salvation!

**From Faith to Faith?**  
**Examining Romans 1:16-17** (page 2)

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,  
According to Your word;  
For my eyes have seen **Your salvation**,  
Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
**A Light of revelation to the Gentiles**,  
**And the glory of Your people Israel.**” (Luke 2:26-32)

Simeon refers to several Old Testament passages:

Isaiah 52:10 / Psalms 98:3. Both Isaiah and the psalmist speak of “the salvation of our God” in the context of being visibly seen by the whole world and as a fulfillment of a divine covenant.

Isaiah 42:6-7; 49:6. Appointed “as a covenant to the people,” God’s righteous Servant is to “raise up” and “restore the preserved ones of Israel,” and will be a “light of the nations” to “open blind eyes” so that God’s “salvation may reach the end of the earth.”

Through Simeon, the Holy Spirit reveals how the infant Jesus fulfills (or will fill) the Old Testament passages of the Messiah; Jesus is the Light that will “open blind eyes” and bring salvation to the world. They reflect God’s faithful commitment to His promised New Covenant and salvation to the world.

When Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee, He visits a synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:14-16). Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth, reads a passage from Isaiah and proclaims that it is immediately fulfilled.

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,  
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.  
He has sent Me **to proclaim release to the captives**,  
**And recovery of sight to the blind**,  
**To set free those who are oppressed**,  
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:17-21)

Jesus is referring to Isaiah 61:1-2 and sees Himself as the object of Isaiah’s prophecy:

- a) anointed by God and the bearer of His Spirit,
- b) the Messiah who brings freedom,
- c) the Prophet who foresees freedom in the context of Jubilee and the eschatological day of God’s vengeance.

With this reference to Isaiah, Jesus:

**From Faith to Faith?**  
**Examining Romans 1:16-17** (page 3)

1. Confirms Simeon's Messianic prophecy of Jesus being the Light - God's salvation that brings good news.
2. Foresees the liberating consequence when His role as Servant completes the task of atonement (Isa 53:10-12).

With a good understanding of the above information, the phrase "for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" becomes clearer.

"From faith" is a reference to the Old Testament Believer ("to the Jew first") who placed their faith in God.

"To faith" is a reference to the New Testament Believer ("and also to the Greek") who placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son just as they honor the Father. The one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (John 5:21-23)

Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Therefore, recognize that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal 3:6-9)

Note: Understanding Greek terms is key to deciphering difficult passages. This is a lot of work, because it may require extensive use of a concordance and survey of the Bible. However, the more accurate your observation of the text, the more lucid your interpretation.