

NOT PULLING ANY PUNCHES

Romans 1

In this first chapter we read of how Paul longs to see the Church in Rome. He finally does actually make it to Rome. His journey to the capital is long and arduous including being arrested and a ship wreck! You can read about it chapters 27 and 28 of the Book of Acts, but for now we begin our ascent up into the Letter to the Romans.

In the first six verses he somehow manages to introduce himself as an apostle, and he provides us a thumbnail sketch of who Jesus is, and how this Gospel of Christ was promised from before the prophets. A constant thread that runs through Romans is not merely who Jesus of Nazareth is, but how he fits completely into God's plan from before all time. He then in verses 8-15 not only speaks of his longing to see the Church in Rome, but he says why he desires to visit.

He desires to impart a spiritual gift, and to preach the Gospel.

[F]or it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.... For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Just pause for a moment and re-read these parts of verses 16-17. The Gospel has power to save, to save people from being in the wrong place with God, from being opposed to God. Then Paul goes onto say that in the Gospel—even in the middle of a crazy world with people doing crazy and even evil things—that the Gospel shows that God is in the right. Have you ever had anyone say something like, "If God is so good, then why is the world so messed up?" Or maybe they have said, "If God really cared about us, then

why does he allow suffering?” Sometimes when people make these statements they are being argumentative, sometimes though it is because they have experienced great tragedy and loss. In what follows in Romans, Paul defends these amazing themes: that God is in the right, and that we can be right with God.

He starts by laying out his case with respect to humanity. I said in the Introduction that Paul presents that humankind has rejected God. In verses 17-31 you might be thinking, “Man does he ever!” Paul is not pulling any punches. I want you to think about our world and ask yourself if you agree with his assessment. Here is the question I will return to: Has most of the world given itself over to human passions and forsaken God?

Ponder that question a bit and in the next chapter I will give you a few more of my thoughts about it. But right now I think you need to stare at what Paul is suggesting. Because if you think the world is generally OK and we just need to put our minds to it more and treat each other better, then you will have trouble with understanding what Paul is saying.

Paul is saying that the existence of God can be known, in fact it is plain to anyone who wants to look. Even after humankind has looked, we have rejected God, and so God has given us over to ourselves with all our passions, which causes us to go from bad to worse. So often people read Romans 1 and see the hot button issues of our day regarding sexuality. It is an important issue, but the bigger issue (yes, there are bigger issues) is whether we are trying to figure out the latest issue in the context of being obedient to God. Or have we, as Paul suggests, completely abandoned God, shaken our fists at God, and said, “We don’t care what you think, because we live as if you do not exist!”

Paul sees the world, both Jew and Gentile, as shaking its fists at God. And so Paul is not pulling any punches as he lays out how he sees the world.