



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

God Revealed

Romans 1:16-17

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Introduction

1. What if what we do as a church misses the point? I'm not asking if it's good, or if it helps people, or renders comfort. I'm not asking if we are doing things God wants his people to do. I'm asking if, in doing what we do, we are realizing the purpose God intended.

2. What prompts my question are reflections like this one:

[T]he world needs the church because, without the church, the world does not know who is it.

The only way for the world to know it is being redeemed is for the church to point to the Redeemer by being a redeemed people. The way for the world to know that it needs redeeming, that it is broken and fallen, is for the church to enable the world to strike hard against something which is an alternative to what the world offers.

Unfortunately, an accommodationist church, so intent on running errands for the world, is giving the world less and less in which to disbelieve. Atheism slips into the church where God really does not matter, as we go about building bigger and better congregations (church administration), confirming people's self-esteem (worship), enabling people to adjust to their anxieties brought on by their materialism (pastoral care), and making Christ a worthy subject for poetic reflection (preaching). At every turn the church must ask itself, Does it really make any difference, in our life together, in what we do, that in Jesus Christ God is reconciling the world to himself?¹

3. Notice their attention to "point[ing] to the Redeemer" and being a "church where God . . . matter[s]." In order to do that, we must focus on God, or more specifically, on knowing God.
 - a. The essence of faith is to please God (Heb. 11:6).
 - b. At its most basic, the way to live is to imitate God (Eph. 5:1).
 - c. The purpose of the discipline we receive from God is that we might share his holiness (Heb. 12:10).
 - d. Furthermore, Jesus defined eternal life in terms of an outcome (ἵνα, *hina*): to "know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn. 17:3).
4. So prominent is that theme that, even in places in the Bible where other big ideas are emphasized, the subject (and object) is God. We'll illustrate from Romans.

¹ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 94-95.

Body

I. Romans Is About God.

A. We often highlight other themes, but "God" is prominent in Romans.

1. The noun θεός (*theos*) appears 153 times, 9.6 times per chapter.
 - a) Jesus (Ἰησοῦς, *Iēsous*) – 36 times.
 - b) Christ (Χριστός, *Christos*) – 65 times.
 - c) Lord (κύριος, *kurios*) – 43 times.
 - d) Faith (πίστις, *pistis*) – 40 times.
 - (1) πιστεύω, *pisteuō*, believe - 21 times.
 - e) Total — 184 times.
2. This shouldn't surprise us when we think about the theme statement (1:16-17).
 - a) It is about gospel, faith (believing), and salvation.
 - b) But the gospel is that which works God's power to bring about that salvation to those who believe in him.
 - c) Of more importance, it is what reveals the righteousness or faithfulness of God.

B. In Romans, Paul shows how *God* kept his word to Israel in Christ Jesus, fulfilling the promises originating with Abraham and offering the possibility for all people to be delivered from the sin that separates us from God.

II. Selections to Illustrate Paul's God-Focus.

A. I once read through Romans looking especially for what it said about God.²

1. I noted what different verses said, grouping repetitive or similar ideas into a list of 39 things the letter teaches about God.
2. If I did that now, some verses might strike me differently, or I might choose different summary words, but the text is the same and basic picture would be, too.
3. The point was to focus on what Romans said about God.

B. To get a feel for what we find, I'll focus on two sections of Romans 8 where θεός appears 18 times, in vv. 3, 7-9, 14, 16-17, 19, 21, 27-28, 31, 33-34, 39.

1. Consider vv. 1-8, where θεός appears four times in vv. 3, 7, and 8.
 - a) Verse 1 reassures that no condemnation, or punishment (κατάκριμα, *katakrima*), will come to "those who are in Christ Jesus," recalling Paul's repetition of the reality of God's wrath (1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4-5) and highlighting the deliverance aspect of salvation.
 - b) Freedom from "the law of sin and death" which occurs "in Christ Jesus" is attributed to what "God has done . . . by sending his own Son" (vv. 2-4).
 - c) God's work on our behalf has the goal of getting us to accept the things of the Spirit, escape hostility to God, submit to God, and please God (vv. 5-8).
2. Consider vv. 18-39, where θεός appears 9 times, in vv. 19, 21, 27-28, 31, 33-34, and 39, in an extended treatment on coping with the trials of life.
 - a) Building on the idea that we are "joint heirs with Christ" in our relationship with God (vv. 16-17), vv. 19, 21, 27, and 28 promise a "revealing of the sons of God,"

² My list, taken from a reading of the NIV text (1984) of Romans, has been added as a supplement (p. 4).

rewarded with "the freedom of glory" as God's final purpose is realized despite life's troubles.

- b) Verses 31, 33-34, and 39 confidently exclaim that God is always "for us," providing for and protecting us via the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.
- C. Notice just three things we learn about God from this chapter.
- 1. He neither takes sin lightly nor dooms us to its slavery.
 - 2. He desires a relationship with us where we have bold access.
 - 3. So long as we love him and seek his will, he protects us until we realize the completion of our victory.

III. Getting to Know God.

- A. Determine that you want to know him.
- 1. A story I once read told of a young lady who was given a book that she could not make herself finish; she found it dry and tedious. Then, she met and fell in love with the author. Returning to the book, she found herself unable to put it down.
 - 2. Hopefully, you are seeing the biblical emphasis on coming to know the Author.
 - a) You still have to learn *about* him.
 - b) You still have to learn his boundaries and why they exist (1 Jn. 2:3-5); but they are the boundaries of love, not tyranny.
- B. Devote the time and effort to get to know him.
- 1. Like any relationship, this one must be nurtured, not left to just happen.
 - 2. In our hurry to get the answers, we sometimes neglect the thrill of nurturing the relationship. Time really is of the essence.
 - a) Read great texts like Isaiah 6, various Psalms, Lamentations 3, etc., looking for God. Or do with Romans and other books what I did in my exercise.
 - b) Then, spend time in prayer and meditation on those traits (Psa. 119:15, 97).

Conclusion

- 1. On January 7, 1855, Charles Spurgeon called on his hearers to contemplate the nature of God. He noted how such a study improves, humbles, expands, and consoles the mind. Relative to the latter, he said, "Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead."³
- 2. God wants us to know him and become more like him. That's the point! Let's stay focused on it.

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³ Charles Spurgeon, Opening remarks of the sermon at the New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, January 7, 1855, as quoted in J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 13-14.

SUPPLEMENT

What Romans Teaches About God

- 1 A God of love -- 1:7; 5:5, 8; 8:39.
- 2 A God of mercy 11:29-32; 12:1.
- 3 The Father of Jesus Christ -- 1:4; 8:3.
- 4 A God who can be an enemy -- 5:10; 8:7.
- 5 A God who rules and is to be served -- 1:9; 6:13, 22; 7:4; 8:34; 9:5; 10:2, 16 ; 11:3; 12:1-2, 19 ; 14:11, 17, 18.
- 6 A God who is in control -- 1:10; 8:27; 9:11, 16; 12:2; 13:1-2; 14:11; 15:32.
- 7 A powerful God -- 1:16; 9:22, 29; 10:9.
- 8 A God who reveals himself to mankind -- 1:17; 3:2, 26; 5:8; 9:6, 22; 15:8.
- 9 A righteous God -- 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22; 10:3.
- 10 A wrathful God -- 1:18; 2:5; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4; cf. 2:8; 4:15; 13:5.
- 11 A God who is capable of being known -- 1:19, 21, 28; 10:1.
- 12 An invisible God -- 1:20.
- 13 An immortal/incorruptible God -- 1:23.
- 14 A God who gives men freedom -- 1:24, 26, 28.
- 15 A God who judges justly -- 2:2, 3, 13, 16; 3:6, 19; 9:14; 11:21, 22; 14:10, 12.
- 16 A kind God -- 2:4.
- 17 A present, watchful God -- 2:13; 4:17; 11:33-34; 16:27.
- 18 A God who is capable of being dishonored -- 2:23, 24; 8:8
- 19 A true and faithful God -- 3:3, 7.
- 20 A God who must be sought -- 3:11; 15:30.
- 21 A God to be feared -- 3:18.
- 22 A giving God -- 3:25; 5:15; 6:23; 8:3; 11:29; 12:3; 15:5, 15.
- 23 A trustworthy God -- 4:3, 20.
- 24 A forgiving God -- 4:8; 11:1-2; 14:3.
- 25 A God to be glorified and praised -- 5:2; 15:6, 7, 9, 11.
- 26 A God in whom we can rejoice -- 5:11.
- 27 A God before whom we can live -- 6:10-11.
- 28 A God to thank -- 6:17; 7:25; 14:6.
- 29 A God with a law to obey -- 7:22, 25; 15:18.
- 30 An indwelling God -- 8:9, 14.
- 31 A God who is a Father -- 8:14, 16, 17, 19, 21; 9:8, 26.
- 32 A God who does what is best for us -- 8:28.
- 33 A God who is for us -- 8:31, 33.
- 34 A patient God -- 9:22.
- 35 A living God -- 9:26.
- 36 A God of hope -- 15:13.
- 37 A God of good news -- 15:16.
- 38 A God of peace -- 15:33; 16:20.
- 39 An eternal God -- 16:26.