

Romans Part 3 (1:15- 2:16)

--1:18-19: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men **who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them...**"

--**special revelation of God = God's Word**

--**general revelation of God = "truth... [*that may*] be known of God [*which*] is manifest in them [*all people*], for God has shown it to them.** For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse..." (Romans 1:18-20)

--those who reject the universally known general revelation of God "suppress the truth in unrighteousness..." (Romans 1:18)

--**Romans 1:21-31:** "although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 **who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator**, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

--**the subject of general revelation brings up the question about how people are saved who have never heard the gospel.**

--the answer is actually quite simple – everyone, no matter how limited their understanding about God, is saved by faith, as Paul stated in his introduction, "the just shall live by faith..." (Romans 1:17) **People in all ages who don't know about Christ are saved by their faith in the limited, general revelation they know about God, similar to how people in Israel were saved by their faith in the limited, special revelation of God**

--In the Old Testament, those in Israel who were saved didn't have faith in Christ, as He was not yet manifested, but their faith in the limited revelation they had from God was the basis of their salvation:

--the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews begins with the same quote that Paul uses in Romans 1:17 – "the just shall live by faith" (Hebrews 10:38)

--Hebrews 11:1-40: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous... By faith Enoch... By faith Noah... By faith Abraham... By faith Sarah... By faith Isaac... By faith Jacob... By faith Joseph... By faith Moses... And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets..."

--Romans 4:3-5: "For what does the Scripture say? '**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.**' 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness..."

--a mysterious passage in 1 Peter suggests that everyone who doesn't hear the gospel in this life, hear it after they die before they get to the "great white throne" judgement (Revelation 20:11) at the end of time.

--1 Peter 3:18 - 4:6: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also **He went and preached to the spirits in prison** [*prison may refer to the abode of the dead who are not in heaven*], 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah... ... 4:5 They [*the unsaved who are presently alive that Peter refers to in the preceding verses*] will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. **6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh** [*those who are alive*], but live according to God in the spirit [*those who are dead live in their spirit apart from their body, or "flesh"*]."

--the Greek words translated "living" and "dead" are used literally in Revelation 1:17-18: "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as **dead**. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, 'Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 I am he that **liveth**, and was **dead**; and, behold, I am **alive** for evermore..."

--*nekrous* = dead (literally or figuratively)

--*zoontas* = to live (literally or figuratively)

--the reality of Christ "preaching the gospel to those in prison" [*dead in hades*] could transcend time so that everyone who hasn't heard the gospel in this life throughout all ages hears the gospel after they die. But again, **God, in His omniscience, would already know their response to the gospel based on their response to general revelation.**

--if people can be saved by their faith in general revelation in the absence of knowledge about God's Word, then why share God's Word with those who haven't heard His Word?

--in one word, *love* – the "love of Christ compels us..." (2 Cor. 5:14) God commands us to spread His Word (Luke 24:47, 2 Timothy 4:2) and those who have faith in general revelation need to hear His Word for their spiritual wellbeing...

--the Word of God is spiritual food and spiritual armor... People need His Word for spiritual growth and spiritual protection - the basic necessities of life: food and shelter, both physical and spiritual.

--when we share God's Word, God works through us to accomplish the purpose Jesus spoke of when He read from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue at the beginning of His ministry: "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me **To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.**" (Luke 4:16-19)

--when people who have responded to general revelation hear God's Word, "the brokenhearted" are healed, "the oppressed" are set free, "the blind" begin to see...

--When we share God's Word we are messengers carry a love letter from the Shepherd to His sheep... Jesus said, "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. **My sheep hear My voice**, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:26-28)

--exposure to the Word of God is a litmus test that reveals whether or not response to general revelation is genuine...

--Hebrews 4:12-13: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.** 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

--if God has "shown it [general revelation] to them [all people]" (Romans 1:19) then why can't He show special revelation in the same way?

--the Word of God is called "the Word of God" because it is just that – His spoken Word, the only way of communicating the details of special revelation to us. And He works through His Body – the Body of Christ – to speak His Words. When we share God's Word we become His voice to others...

--2 Corinthians 5:20-21: "Now then, **we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us:** we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

--1 Corinthians 2:13-15: "**These things we also speak [the truth of the gospel], not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches,** comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

--it's easy to discount the profound nature of the spoken word...

--God didn't think creation into existence, He spoke creation into existence! "God said, 'Let there be light.' ...God said, 'Let there be...!' God said... God said... God said..." (Genesis 1:6-31)

--Hebrews 11:3: "By faith we understand that **the worlds were framed by the word of God**, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."

--genuine faith naturally results in good works...

--**Romans 2:5-16** explains that genuine faith in both the general and special revelation of God (His Word) results in good works.

--as James points out, "faith without works is dead." (James 3:26)

--those without the special revelation of God's Word have "the law written in their hearts..." (Romans 2:15)

--Paul's wording in Romans 2 makes it sound like we are saved by our works, but in the context of the rest of the book, it becomes clear that Paul is simply pointing out that God uses our works to establish whether or not we have genuine faith

--in His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus gives us a few insights into the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives before knowledge about Christ and before the dynamic of the Holy Spirit that began at Pentecost...

--John 3:18-21: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

--the light of Christ in the world is the ultimate expression of the truth of God that He has revealed to everyone in their heart throughout all ages... **Just as people "suppresses the truth..." of general revelation in their heart (Romans 1:18) so they "do not come to the light" of Christ (John 3:20).** But, as Jesus said, "he who does the truth [*responds to the truth that God has already revealed in their heart*] comes to the light [*of Christ*], that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

--in it's context at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, "**deeds... done in God**" refers to actions done by people before they knew anything about Christ and before the dynamic of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost... So even before the dynamic of the Holy Spirit that began at Pentecost, the Spirit of God somehow worked in people who responded to the general revelation in their heart...

--not everyone who does good works has genuine faith. **Christ is "the light of the world", and those whose good works "have been done in God" (John 3:21) naturally "come to the**

light" (John3:20,21). A persons response to Jesus Christ shows their true colors. **As He said,**
"My sheep hear My voice..." (John 10:28)