

Romans 1:14-20**Paul's three 'I am' statements****The threefold Revelation of God****1. Paul's three 'I am' statements (1:14-16)****a. 1:14 I am a debtor**

Paul isn't talking about a monetary debt but about his indebtedness to Jesus for the free gift of salvation. This is a debt we can never pay off, but out of gratitude to God we can share Paul's desire to give the gospel to a lost world. (cf Romans 13:8)

b. 1:15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome

This is the kind of enthusiasm we often find hard, but need!

c. 1:16 I am not ashamed

There was no status attached to preaching the gospel in the 1st century; there were no King's College Chapel's for the great apostle to preach in! The gospel was largely received by the poor. But Paul was not ashamed because he knew the gospel had (and has) power to change the human heart.

2. The threefold Revelation of God (1:17-20)

Romans 1:17 *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous shall live by faith."*

This verse represents Paul's opening remarks concerning the gospel. The verse is a densely compact summary of the gospel, and indeed of the book of Romans. But what does Paul mean by *gospel*?

First, it has an Old Testament background: it is God's good news (e.g. Isaiah 40:9). This was more than individuals being saved. It included God re-establishing his people, overcoming his enemies and reigning on earth again.

Second, interestingly the word *gospel* was used as Roman propaganda. The birth of Augustus Caesar was declared to be good news for the world. The Emperor was son of god who would usher in universal peace on earth through the State. So the message was clear: put your hope in the government, Caesar is the good news!

Yet Paul, writing to the heart of the Roman Empire, was proclaiming another Messiah, a Jewish Messiah – Caesar couldn't compete with Him! (See Romans 1:3-4).

a. The Revelation of the Righteousness of God in the Gospel

In 1:17 Paul quotes from Habukkuk 2:4. It is as if Paul is saying, "This morning I'm going to preach on Habukkuk 2:4!" Habukkuk 2:4 is the key verse in Habukkuk, and Romans 1:17 is the key verse in

Romans. Habukkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah, receives a message from God that He will judge wicked Judah by raising up the Chaldeans as His rod of correction. Yet He will not completely destroy His people. Habukkuk asks God how such a wicked and ruthless people as the Chaldeans can get “away with murder.” God answers that they won’t and in the end the power of the Chaldeans will also be broken. In the end *the earth will be willed with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habukkuk 2:14)*. This vision awaits an appointed time, but it will certainly come (Hab 2:3). Meanwhile, and in the face of inevitable judgment, *the righteous shall live by his faith (Hab 2:4)*.

What Habukkuk sees from afar Paul makes clear in the book of Romans: the way we can be put right with God is by faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose to life again.

b. The Revelation of the wrath of God from heaven

Romans 1:18 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godliness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*

Liberal theology rejects the idea of God’s wrath. But you may have noticed the world is not quite the way we would like it to be. God didn’t suddenly change his attitude to evil with the coming of Jesus. The wrath of God is still being revealed against ungodliness – that is, sin against God though unbelief and rebellion; and against unrighteousness – that is, against sin against human beings, such as dishonesty, lying, sexual sins, murder and so on. This ungodliness and unrighteousness is suppressed, which means it is denied (e.g. denial is the first issue alcoholics must overcome to get free.)

c. The Revelation of the reality of God in Creation

Romans 1:19-20 *For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

There is a universal witness to God in creation which all human beings have access to. This is called natural revelation. We read about it in the Psalms (e.g. Psalm 8 and 19). The revelation gives human beings a sense of right and wrong and an understanding of the basic attributes of God. The revelation is limited in that it does not lead to salvation. But it is sufficient to condemn the human heart, and therefore *men are without excuse (1:20)*.

To be an atheist is the most ridiculous and illogical thing (Psalm 14:1). However we have witnessed a significant rise in atheism in our day. Leading atheist and biologist Richard Dawkins admits astounding design in creation. But to remain true to his atheism he calls it “*the appearance of design*” and says “*natural selection overwhelmingly impresses us with the illusion of design and planning.*” [Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, 1996, p. 1,21]. Therefore modern atheist says to the believer (and teaches society) that the idea of a Designer is an illusion in the mind. Yet the word of God says *men are without excuse*.