

# RELATIONSHIPS AND REVELATIONS

LISTENING FOR GOD THROUGH ROMANS 1:8-25

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## SUMMARY

Even before creation, there were relationships—between God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) loves and communes with one other. God, by His very nature, is relational. Then we came on the scene. God created and relates to us, and He inspires love between His children. Paul loved the Roman church and longed to be with them. Today's church is a loving community of relationships that reflects (in its best moments) the love among the Godhead. The Church is relational, in the image of God.

How can we relate to God if we don't know Him? We can only know Him because He has made himself known. He revealed himself through "natural revelation"—in nature and in human conscience. No person born on earth can say, "I never

heard.” We have no excuse, since we all are witnesses of God through nature. The blowing wind. A newborn baby’s cry. A field of flowers in full bloom.

Nature isn’t even the best picture of God ever taken, though. Jesus Christ is—He is Revelation with a capital “R,” *the* Revelation of God. In Jesus Christ, we meet *very* God. When we enter a relationship with Christ, we enter a relationship with the Godhead and with the family of God, for none can call God “Father” who does not call the Church “Brother” and “Sister.”

## PREPARATION FOCUS YOUR THOUGHTS

What person do you long to see who is far away?

What group of people whom you’ve never met would you like to visit?

Share about a time when you felt closer to God when in nature.

## READING HEAR THE WORD

When we read Romans, we are “looking over the shoulders” of the first-century, conservative Jewish Christians who received the letter. It is perhaps the most orderly attempt in the New Testament at answering the questions conservative, deep-thinking Christian Jews would be asking about the gospel. The way of salvation to a Jew prior to Christ’s life, death, and resurrection had been clear: *We are God’s chosen*

*people; the Law<sup>3</sup> was given to us; we attempt to obey the Law; sacrifices and rituals provide atonement for our sins where we miss the mark (Leviticus 6:8—7:18); and righteousness<sup>4</sup> comes by obedience to God's commands.*

Paul preached a different kind of gospel: *a righteousness that came through faith by grace due to Christ's own once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross.* It is no wonder conservative, well-behaved Jewish Christians might resist Paul's new teaching. Would people "saved by faith in Christ and not obedience to the Law" then abandon any commitment to holy living? Was the Law useless? Why did God give the Law if He was going to make the Law invalid? Was being the "chosen people" wasted? Does the coming of Christ destroy the Old Testament?

Romans 1 is the preface to this wonderful book—perhaps the greatest attempt by Paul to explain the gospel<sup>5</sup> in a way that satisfies the human mind. Read this first section of Romans as

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3. For the Jewish person in Paul's day the Law would be the first five books of the Old Testament, referred to as the Torah. The main focus of the Law would be the Ten Commandments.

4. Righteousness is the quality or condition of being right or good. The righteous are people who live righteous lives. The righteous are people who live in right relation to God. Thus, the righteous are people who have been justified by God. (Eby, J. Wesley, ed. *A Dictionary of the Bible & Christian Doctrine in Everyday English*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), p. 253-254.

5. The gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ. Gospel is from the Greek word *evangel*, which means "the good news of victory." The victory of Jesus over sin has made salvation possible for all people. This is the message of the gospel. It is a message that God loves sinners and wants to forgive them. He wants them to be free from sin and spiritual death. (Eby, J. Wesley, ed. *A Dictionary of the Bible & Christian Doctrine in Everyday English*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), p. 119.

if you were opening a letter from the famed and loved apostle Paul—read it as a letter.

MEDITATION  ENGAGE THE WORD

*Meditate on Romans 1:8-17*

What are some of the verbs Paul uses to express his relationship with the Roman church in this passage? What do they tell us about Paul's relationship with these people?

Describe Paul's relationship with the Romans. Though Paul had not yet visited the Roman church, he apparently already knew many in the church. Glance over his farewell in Romans 15:1-16 to find hints describing the sort of people who got the letter of Romans.

What was the Roman church "famous" for across the then-known world? While our intention should never be fame, what sort of things today could get a church a reputation for famous faith?

Paul claimed to serve God with his "whole heart"—a heart fully devoted to following Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be a half-hearted Christian? How can a half-hearted Christian become whole-hearted?

The Roman Christians were already believers, yet Paul longs to preach the gospel to them that is "the power of God unto

salvation.” Today we think of preaching the gospel as something to do for unbelievers. What value is it for *believers* to hear the gospel message?

Reflect on the quote by Pope John Paul II. What does it mean to have a righteousness *by faith*? How do we live by faith in our daily lives?

*Faith leads us beyond ourselves. It leads us directly to God.*  
—Pope John Paul II

### *Meditate on Romans 1:18-20*

We don't like to talk about the “wrath of God,” but Paul saw God's wrath already being revealed. Does God reveal His wrath today? If so, to whom does He do this and why?

Think about the quote on God's wrath by Joseph Ratzinger. Close your eyes and visualize this picture in your mind—a raging river into which people determine to walk. How would seeing God's wrath this way change our views?

*The wrath of God is a way of saying that I have been living in a way that is contrary to the love that is God. Anyone who begins to live and grow away from God, who lives away from what is good, is turning his life toward wrath.*  
—Joseph Ratzinger

The clearest revelation of God is in Jesus Christ, of course, not nature, but God has already revealed himself in creation, making all humans accountable for the revelation they have received. What does nature tell us about God?

Paul argues that all humans are accountable due to this “natural revelation,” so they have no excuses when they face the judgment. Think about yourself—what have *you* heard that makes you more accountable than those who have only natural revelation?

Meditate on the quote by William Cowper. How does nature fall short of telling us the full story of God? What does Jesus Christ reveal about God that is far more complete than the revelation of nature?

*Nature is a good name for an effect whose cause is  
God.* *—William Cowper*

*Meditate on 1:21-25*

How might a person know God yet not glorify Him? How did the idolaters of this passage know God?

How bad must it get before God gives people over to their own sinfulness, in a sense letting them go to the logical end of their path? This passage seems to be more about a people than a person. Does God abandon nations? tribes? denomina-

tions? local churches? Can you think of any time in biblical history where God seemed to withdraw from a people and let them continue on their sinful path—at least for a time?

PRAYER ✝ ASK AND LISTEN

Seek the face of God. Ask, “Lord, what are You saying to us today?”

In group sentence prayers, first *praise* God for the beauty of creation, and then *thank* Him for Jesus Christ’s revelation, and finally *ask* Him to help your church illustrate loving relationships.

CONTEMPLATION ✝ REFLECT AND YIELD

If God has best revealed himself in Jesus, what should you do to know more about what Jesus Christ was like?



GROUP STUDY

- What about the gospel message might tempt a Christian to be “ashamed” or embarrassed by it?
- Has there ever been a time when you were too embarrassed or ashamed to share the gospel message. If so, how did this experience make you feel?

## ROMANS

- How does nature reveal to you the character of God? Are there ways in which nature falls short in explaining the full range of who God is?
- How can we daily glorify God and thank Him for who He is and all He does? How can we avoid futile (useless) thinking (v. 21)?
- What are the ways we can seek the wisdom and truth of God in our everyday lives?
- Take time to think about all the ways you can serve God this coming week.