

God's Power To Save

Romans 1:15-17

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Introduction: The beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans has thus far revealed four truths about his relationship to God and the Gospel.

- Paul has been called by God and tasked with preaching **The Gospel**.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

- **The Gospel** concerns Jesus Christ. The Gospel is Jesus Christ!

Romans 1:1b-3 the gospel of God, ² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,

- Paul's service for God is preaching **the Gospel** to men

Romans 1:9 ⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you,

- He is obliged to preach **The Gospel** because it is the only means of eternal life.

Romans 1:14 ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

Starting with verse 15 God introduces the Gospel itself. He will take the next 15 chapters to explain it and since the destiny of your eternal soul is determined by your understanding of The Gospel, this information should be supremely important to you. God starts the entire revelation of the Gospel with a three verse summary statement.

Romans 1:15-17 ¹⁵ So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Look at these three verses and let's make several opening observations. Because Paul is proud of the Gospel [16a], he is anxious to preach it to the Romans. [15] He is proud of it [16a] because it is or contains or applies [like medicine to the dying] the salvation of God to any men who believe [16b]. The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God [17a] and that righteousness is received and possessed by faith [17b]. God's righteousness is the only way a man will live [17c]

Paul has a message that he is obliged to give to men. He is constrained because it is like having food in a famine or an artesian spring during a time of drought. Like having the antiserum for a snake bite and not giving it, only infinitely more vital. The Gospel is the solution to the eternal destiny of all men [all of whom are sinners, alienated from God and who cannot find reconciliation]. Paul is eager to give it. He knows men often mock it, but he is not ashamed because he knows it is true and saves men. Rome is filled with Jews and non-Jews. He knows it will save both groups! He introduces the Gospel by offering five foundational truths about it. The rest of Paul's letter will fill in all the details.

- It is the power of God to Save [16a]
- It is universal in its impact and influence [16b]
- It reveals the righteousness of GOD! [17a]
- It is only understood, received and consummated by faith [17b]
- It provides the only....ONLY source of life giving righteousness [17c]

The Gospel is the power of God to Save [16a]

Paul has already said [15] that he is eager to preach the gospel. He wants to willingly fulfill his obligation to give to the Romans the one thing that all men need. Verse sixteen then begins this two verse summary statement about the Gospel and in many ways about the entire book of Romans.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

I am not ashamed of the gospel: Paul did not get a warm welcome in most places he preached.

Thessalonica: ² And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."..... ⁵ But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.....shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. **Acts 17:2-10**

Athens: ³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." ³³ So Paul went out of their midst. **Acts 17:32-33**

Corinth: ⁵ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶ But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." **Acts 18:5-6**

Those are just three places. Paul was writing from Corinth and his experience there convinced him that....

1 Corinthians 1:18 ¹⁸ the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Now if most people think your message is foolish what does that make you? A fool and you should be ashamed of yourself! Right? But Paul had seen the risen Christ. He had heard Him call to him and appoint him to proclaim the Gospel. He had received grace after being himself a blasphemer and a killer of Christians.

What was Paul preaching in all these places? A new religion? Nonsense! He was preaching Christ. He was offering Jesus Himself to his hearers. Jesus was and is the Christ. He was and is the Messiah that the Scriptures have always said would come. He was without sin and He willingly took your place in death so that you can be reconciled to God. What do you have to do to be saved? Jesus answered precisely when the crowds.....

John 6:28-29 ²⁸ asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"
²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Paul was not ashamed of his message because he could not bring himself to be ashamed of Jesus who had poured out so much love, compassion, grace and forgiveness on him. If you understand this it will help you overcome your reluctance to speak about Jesus to men.

It is the power of God for salvation: This is a second reason why Paul is not ashamed and cannot be shamed into silence. He knows that among those who mock and scoff will be men and women who will be saved by the preaching of the Gospel. First thing to notice is this....IT IS THE POWER OF GOD. We forget this as Christians. It is not the power of man or religion or us or anything other than God. God is the power behind the message. You do not need to make it relevant for it to work. God likes the Gospel and chooses it at the sole means of saving mankind.

1 Corinthians 1:21-24 God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

You don't want to be wasting your time telling people something that is NOT the gospel. Don't spend time worrying about the sin in people's lives and trying to transform them. There is no power in moralism. It is self-righteousness and it cannot save anyone. It cannot bring them to Christ who really can transform their lives in the inner man. Don't look down on people because they are sinners. Understand this....so are you, but the Gospel has brought you into intimate relationship with the God of creation. It is the POWER OF GOD and not men. Trust it to do its work and stop trying to help it. Remember the sneerers in Athens. Well Dr. Luke records this about them...

Acts 17:34 ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

The Gospel is universal in its impact and influence [16b]

To everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek: The word Greek in the New Testament is a synonym for “Non-Jew. Everyone who is not a Jew is a Greek or gentile. The Gospel of Christ is universal and yet Scripture hastens to add a caveat....”to the Jew first.” Some say this is just chronological. In other words, the Gospel was preached first to the Jew and then the Gentile, but that is not the normal sense of this type of statement. It sounds like the Jews have some sort of first dibs on the Gospel.

Romans 3:1-2 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Paul thinks the Jews have a great privilege and advantage over the Gentiles. They are the chosen people from among the nations. God sent His Son into the world through them. He gave them the prophets and the Scriptures and the Feasts and the Sacrifices and every single one of those benefits would point to Christ.

Romans 9:3-5 ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

But the Gospel is not for the Jew alone....no matter how privileged they have been throughout the centuries. It is for all men in every age.

The Gospel reveals the righteousness of GOD! [17a]

Romans 1:17 ¹⁷ For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed: Let me ask you a question: How does a person...no.....how do YOU intend to get to heaven? What do YOU have to do to get into heaven when you die? How would you answer? Here are some suggestions.....

Be sincerely sorry for your sins or repent? Can you ever know if you are sincere enough?

Keep the ten commandments? BUT... Have you EVER lied? EVER taken the Lord's name in vain? EVER disobeyed your parents? EVER stolen anything? That is just four of them. Do you think you might lie again sometime or break some other command of God? How have you done so far when you have promised yourself that you would never commit that sin again? I thought so!

How about trying to make amends? Do good from now on and hope you can balance the scale. But this cannot work. Nothing can change or undo the past. Suppose someone steals your life savings and then say to the judge, "I am so sorry and I will never do this again." Would you be satisfied if the judge just let him walk out of the courtroom? Of course not! You would be angry because that is not just! It is not right and everyone knows it!

How about changing your lifestyle? Get rid of old habits, clean up on the outside and change the way you talk and entertain yourself? This was common in my youth!

Did any of these responses come to your mind when I asked how you intend to get God to let you into heaven? If so you are not alone. This is the way most of the world thinks about salvation. It is the default condition of men...the ABC's of getting right with God. Scripture warns you not to let such things take your mind captive.

Colossians 2:8 ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

The elementary or ABC's of righteousness in the world are all works of righteousness that you MUST do. God says we should "die" to those...

Colossians 2:20-22 ²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Everything we have just talked about has something to do with your own righteous behavior. A righteousness of men! The things that all men believe will make them righteous. But in the Gospel "The Righteousness of God is revealed." The righteousness of men is pathetic. Even the most scrupulously religious Christians are unrighteous.

James 2:10 ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

Paul Himself affirmed this truth.

1 Timothy 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

This was the perfect time for Paul to use a past tense verb like most Christians do. "Among whom I was foremost." But our take on ourselves is not true. We are still sinners. We are unrighteous and whatever righteousness things we do or pretend to do are the "Righteousness of men." The Gospel is offering you the Righteousness of God. It is perfect, total and all inclusive. It is the righteousness that you need to go to heaven and spend eternity in a place that has no sin and never has had any. How will we ever get it? After what we have said here, what could we ever do to possess it?

The Gospel is only understood, received and consummated by faith [17b]

God's righteousness is said to be "**revealed from faith to faith.**": Here is an expression that in all likelihood means entirely by faith. It is literally "faith into faith" and was a Pauline idiom. He used it with the Corinthians to describe his life as a Gospel Preacher. He preached the same Gospel to those who would believe and those who would reject. Both made him smell like Christ, but with vastly different results.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 ¹⁵ For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; ¹⁶ to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

The NIV seems to have captured the English sense of this about as well as can be done.

Romans 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,

The Gospel provides the only....THE ONLY source of life giving righteousness [17c]

As it is written, "**BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.**": Many English Bibles follow the King James translation of this phrase. When we read this phrase by itself we usually think it means something like this..."The righteous man will live a life of faith." But, I must suggest that Paul could not possibly mean that. To begin with He will soon make this universal assertion...

Romans 3:10-12 ⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands, no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one."

It would be strange for him to suggest here that there are righteous men who live on the basis of faith when he is about to teach that there are no righteous men.

As it turns out what Paul said in the Greek can be translated slightly differently without contorting the Greek. This verse begins by telling us that the Gospel reveals a righteousness that is God's and not man's. God's righteousness is the only righteousness that will fit us for heaven and eternal life and this verse tells us that it is taken hold of, by faith alone. So this verse concludes by combining these two thoughts into one. The Greek easily bears this translation. The righteous man by faith, will live. Leon Morris says:

Paul is speaking of the way a person is made righteous, namely by faith, and assuring us that it is the one who is made righteous in this way who will live. **Leon Morris**

Douglass Moo concludes:

“Of greatest significance is the way Paul in Romans one through eight consistently links faith with righteousness and shows how life is the product of that righteousness.

Romans 5:18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”

Douglas Moo

One translation finished 60 years ago captured the sense of it this way....

Romans 1:17 "He who through faith is righteous shall live." RSV

CONCLUSION: God will be explaining the most vital thing any human can know on the pages that follow. It is the way back to God. It is the only way to be saved and it flies in the face of everything that humans have been taught and normally believe. Because of this reality, preaching the Gospel is an uphill battle. All humans are moralists at heart....believing that you get to heaven by doing good, making amends or being sorry for your sin. Or they are religious, believing that God will trade heaven for some ritual performed or devotion professed. Many evangelicals believe that God trades their faith for heaven. Faith being our work to do. If we do it God will give us grace and salvation.

Romans puts the lie to every moral and religious effort of men. This means your efforts and mine as well. Even when the gospel is preached most people continue to trust in their own efforts and intrinsic goodness. They trust in the righteousness of man while the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God and tells the only way it can become yours.

I challenge you to break out of your comfort zone. Apply your heart and mind to understand what Scripture teaches about salvation in Christ Alone, through Faith Alone. Forsake your own ideas and embrace God's. Make certain you know and understand the Gospel. It will change your Christian life entirely to internalize what God is giving you in Romans. I want you to have it! I want you to desire it and rejoice in it like Paul....

Philippians 3:4-9 ⁴ If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.