

Romans 1:16-17: An Exposition

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Perhaps one of the simplest statements of the gospel in all of Scripture is found in Romans 1:16-17. Paul mentions this terse statement about the gospel at the beginning of his letter to the Romans since this gospel represents the central idea that he will develop and amplify throughout the book. These verses say, "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. 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." Paul introduces eight ideas here that are important to understand in order to comprehend the full ramifications of the gospel.

First, he notes that he is "not ashamed of the gospel." Although Timothy, Paul's ministerial protégé, would one day become ashamed of the gospel (2 Tim 1:8), Paul refused to yield to this temptation.

Second, Paul explained that the reason he was not ashamed of the gospel is because it represented "the power of God." The Greek word translated "power" is the word *dynamis* from which we get our English words "dynamic" and "dynamite." In other words, the gospel represents a transformative power when unleashed in the life of an individual. Thus, Paul was never ashamed or embarrassed to be identified as a proponent of the gospel.

Third, Paul explains that the gospel is the power of God "unto Salvation." What type of power does the gospel introduce? It has the power "unto salvation" or the power to save a sinner. No other commodity known to man has an equivalent capacity.

Fourth, Paul explains that the gospel is for "everyone." Much confusion has been caused in the body of Christ down through the centuries by five-point Calvinism's emphasis on "limited atonement." This errant belief contends that Christ only died for the elect. Paul, through use of the term "everyone" is indicating that he knew nothing of limited atonement. Rather, Paul, and the rest of Scripture, is clear that Christ's death is for the entire world or unlimited in scope (John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 6:51; 12:32, 47; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor 5:19; 1 Tim 2:4, 6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Heb 2:9; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 2:2).

Fifth, Paul explains the one condition of salvation through his use of the term "believes." How many conditions must be met before a sinner receives the benefits of the gospel? There are probably somewhere between 150 to 200 New Testament passages which singularly condition a lost person's salvation upon belief alone in Christ (John 3:16; 6:28-29; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16, etc...). "Belief" is merely a synonym for faith or confidence or trust in God's provision. The moment a lost person exercises trust

in Christ is the moment he is saved. Lewis Sperry Chafer, Theologian and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, entitled this biblical phenomenon: "Belief: God's One Condition of Salvation."

Sixth, Paul explains his priority in preaching the gospel through the expression "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." This statement reveals who received the first opportunity to hear and believe the gospel during Paul's evangelistic efforts. Because the Jews are the chosen people (Gen 12:1-3; Rom 3:2; 9:1-5), Paul made it a habit of visiting them first so they could have the opportunity to hear and believe the gospel's message. We see this pattern exhibited many times in not only Paul's ministry (Acts 17:1-3) but also in the ministry of Jesus (Matt 10:5-7).

Seventh, Paul notes the specific benefit that the gospel bequeaths to sinful humanity through the expression "For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed." What the gospel offers is a revelation of God's righteousness. It is not a righteousness of one's own making (Isa 64:6; Eph 2:8-9) but rather a righteousness belonging only to Christ. This righteousness is transferred (or imputed) to the sinner (Philip 3:9) at the point of personal faith or trust in the gospel's message.

Eighth, Paul explains that the gospel entails far more than simply justification or freedom from sin's penalty. Justification is the most important step but it is only a first step. The very gospel power (or *dynamis*) that justifies the sinner is also the very same power that will help the believer grow into Christ's likeness in this life. Such Christ-likeness is called progressive sanctification, which involves learning to live a life that is free of sin's power while we remain in our current bodies in this life. Unlike justification, which takes place at a moment in time, sanctification is a gradual process whereby we learn to live the Christian life through dependence upon the divine resources. Just as it takes faith to experience initial justification, it also takes faith to experience progressive sanctification. Those that have trusted in Christ to experience initial justification must continue to trust in Christ and His resources in order for progressive sanctification to become a reality in their lives. This is what Paul means through the expression "from faith to faith." Saving faith justifies the sinner. However, the newborn child of God must continue to trust in Christ and His resources in order for his daily life to be conformed and transformed into Christ-likeness.

Paul communicates the same point through the phrase "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH," which is a citation from Habakkuk 2:4. In context, this Old Testament quote is directed at the Israelite community that is about to experience the Babylonian deportation and resulting captivity just a few years down the road. The prophet Habakkuk exhorts the Jews to continue trusting in God in the midst of this imminent hardship. Although many construe the prophet's words as an initial invitation to salvation, they can also be interpreted as an invitation for God's redeemed people to continue to trust in Him in the midst of life's adversities. By way of application, Paul exhorts us to continue using our faith in Christ's power even after initial justification. As we do so, we have the potential of experiencing progressive sanctification.

In sum, Romans 1:16-17 represents critical seed truths about the Gospel message, which Paul will water and develop further throughout his masterful treatment on Soteriology (doctrine of Salvation) called the Book of Romans.