

FPFWC Christian Development



Faith and Salvation

July 2021

Summer Quarter

July 10, 2021

Lesson #2 – Power of the Gospel

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Romans 1:8-17

ICE BREAKER –

1. What is the “Gospel” and why is it so important?
2. What are challenges to sharing the gospel?
3. How does a person become righteous?

Key Verse: I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. —Romans 1:16

LESSON BACKGROUND

Cities seemed to hold a special attraction for Paul in a strategic way. Three of his key ministries were in Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus—all among the 10 largest cities of the empire. But Paul had a burning desire to visit the greatest city of them all, Rome, the capital of the empire and center of the world in those days.

The saying, “All roads lead to Rome” was more than proverbial for Paul. The city was unparalleled in the ancient world. After Rome’s decline in late antiquity, Europe would not see anything to rival it until London in the nineteenth century. Paul was convinced that God was calling him to go to Rome.

Paul, formerly Saul the persecutor of Christians, wrote the letter to the Romans in advance of his trip there. A church was growing in Rome, a church made up of individuals who were likely present in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:10) and of believers they converted.

Some of those whom Paul had led to Christ seemed to have traveled to Rome ahead of him for one reason or another. That is clear from the list of personal greetings that Paul includes at the end of the letter, in chapter 16. It was important to Paul that they grow in the right direction. They needed a strong doctrinal base, and they needed some practical spiritual counsel. In this letter they received both.

Paul wrote the book of Romans in about AD 58, during his third missionary journey. This timing is supported by Acts 20:2–3, which states that Paul spent three months in Greece. This in turn supports the conclusion that Paul wrote from the Greek city of Corinth, home of a beloved church he had founded and ministered to for 18 months a few years earlier. Staying put in this Greek city among people he knew and loved would have allowed Paul the time to craft such a carefully, masterfully written letter.

The contents of Romans reflect Paul's experience in presenting a gospel that is both doctrinal and relational in matters faced by growing Christians. Paul was in the prime years of his ministry, being able to present the fruit of his personal familiarity with bringing people to Christ and providing an atmosphere for their growth. He was prepared to send a letter that addressed many important issues, countered spiritual errors, and emphasized core truths of the Christian faith.

LESSON COMMENTARY

1:8–15. Paul gives the reason for his planned visit to Rome: **so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established** (v. 11), **so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles** (v. 13), and **I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians ...** (v. 14). The **spiritual gift** is not specified. Paul would need to determine what kind of help they needed before he could specify what gift(s) he would use for their benefit. Verse 14 provides the basis for his strong desire to minister with the Romans. He **was under obligation** and **eager** to do so, reflecting God's sovereign plans for him (Ac 9:15; 22:21; 26:16–20; 1Co 9:16–23).

1:16–17. These verses are often seen as the theme verses for Romans, though they correspond better with chaps. 1–8 than 9–16. **For** (1:16) offers an explanation for Paul's eagerness to evangelize (1:15): **I am not ashamed of the gospel. For** (second occurrence in 1:16) gives the reason Paul is not ashamed: **it is the power of God. Power** means "mighty potency; an effective, transforming force and ability." **Salvation** was a word used in Greco-Roman settings for an individual being rescued from some physical peril, perhaps from a burning house or from drowning. Here it is God's deliverance of sinners from the eternal consequences of sin. **Believes** was used most often for trust or reliance upon a person and what he says. Paul uses it for one's reliance upon Christ for salvation. **To the Jew first and also to the Greek** probably describes the good fit the gospel of Christ is for the Jewish people (see 1:2–3). While it is true that the gospel came first to and then through the Jewish people historically (see Jn 4:22), Paul's point here in vv. 16–17 seems to be theological (note the words "power," "salvation," "everyone who believes") rather than historical, and Rm 1:2–3 appears to show the special relevance of the gospel to the Jewish people because it has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures.

For (1:17) explains *why* the gospel is the power of God (1:16): **in it the righteousness of God is revealed.** The phrase **righteousness of** [i.e., "that originates with"] **God** has become enormously controversial. Is this the covenant faithfulness of God? Is it God's act of announcing or undertaking the vindication of His people on the judgment day? No doubt it includes these elements. But these signal what God's righteousness *does* rather than *what it is*. A better view is that the **righteousness of God** is God's moral virtue and excellence that prompts Him to do all that He does, including (among other things) bringing people into a proper relationship with Him, but also judging people for their sin. God's moral virtue and excellence includes His justice that leads Him to judge sinners, but also His love

that leads Him in Christ to redeem them. Paul's emphasis in this verse is on the latter. Paul will make it clear in 3:21–26 that the key is not found in securing one's own righteousness by keeping the law, but in God reckoning His own righteousness to those who have faith in His Son. This righteousness is **revealed** ("fully disclosed") **from faith to faith**. The latter phrase is difficult, and it is best not to be dogmatic. A parallel construction is found with "from" and "to" in 2Co 2:16 ("from death to death" and "from life to life"). There the phrases suggest that Paul's ministry resulted exclusively in death for the lost, and exclusively in life for believers. In Rm 1:17, the construction probably designates that faith in Christ is the only way one can receive God's righteousness.

Paul cites Hab 2:4 for support. It should be translated "The one who is righteous by faith will live (be saved)." He uses the same verse in Gl 3:11 where he cites it to support how one receives eternal life (not through works of the law).

LESSON NUGGET – God has good news! It is promised in the Old Testament and centered in Jesus Christ. He alone purchased salvation, and this message must be preached to the whole world. Why? Because the gospel alone is "the power of God to salvation". Paul was gripped by the gospel; his whole life was controlled by it; he felt himself to be a debtor to the whole world. (v.14) Through His church, God is calling people to Jesus Christ (vv.5-7). Has the gospel gripped you?

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary and Wiersbe Expository Outlines on the New Testament*