

The Book of Romans



LESSON TWO: THE THEME (1:16-19)

THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The gospel is God's power to save by faith.

Understanding Romans begins with understanding the theme of the book found in 1:16 & 17.

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.

THE GOSPEL: This is the emphasis of Paul's letter. He is not ashamed of the gospel because it is God's power to save. Notice its beauty:

1. **Its EFFICACY:** the **power**
2. **Its DIVINITY:** of **God**
3. **Its PURPOSE:** for **salvation**
4. **Its AUDIENCE:** to **everyone**
5. **Its CONDITION:** who **believes**
6. **Its ORDER:** **Jews** first, to the **Greek** (everybody else)

Paul will argue in this book that God **gives salvation** to those who believe. This is in sharp contrast with the Jewish thought of his day that man acquired righteousness by doing good things. This exact thought troubles us today – that we have to somehow be good enough in and of ourselves to go to heaven. Too many people doubt the reality of the free gift of salvation and anxiously try to prove to God by their good works that they are worthy of being saved. Let us realize the gospel promises us that God will give us His righteousness if we will simply believe. Paul explains this point.

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."

THE GOSPEL PLAN: Within the gospel is revealed the **righteousness of God**. This phrase does not refer to God's own personal righteousness, for it has already been revealed in the Old Testament. Paul is speaking of the righteousness given by God to the person who believes. Stated in another way: *when we have faith, we are made by God to be just as righteous as He is*. By quoting Habakkuk 2:4 Paul argues that this is how God always regarded man as righteous: "*the righteous man shall live by faith*." Later, in Romans 4, Paul will use Abraham as an example of this righteousness by faith:

"Abraham believed God,
and it was **credited** to him as righteousness" (4:3)

DEFINITIONS

ASHAMED: from *disfigurement* and then *disgrace*; the feeling of shame; fear of humiliation which prevents one from doing something

GOSPEL: GK *euaggelion*, good tidings, news that makes the heart glad or merry

POWER: GK *dunamis*, universally, "inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth" (English: dynamo, dynamite)

RIGHTEOUSNESS: GK *dikaïosuné*, to be right, as one ought to be; the virtue or quality of being just; refers to what is deemed right by the Lord (after His examination), i.e. what is approved in His eyes; the condition acceptable to God

FAITH: GK *pistis*, conviction of the truth of anything, belief; to be persuaded; to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust; trust that results in obedience

MEMORY VERSES:
Romans 1:16, 17

FAITH TO FAITH: The phrase 'faith to faith' used by Paul has been given many different meanings. Close examination will reveal that Paul is stating that believing in God's plan to save will lead one to actually exercising that plan (i.e. having faith in Jesus). Consider these texts:

1. Mark 1:15 "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and **believe** in the gospel."
2. Romans 3:21-22 "But now, apart from the Law, the **righteousness of God** has been revealed, as attested by the Law and the Prophets. 22 And this righteousness from God comes through **faith in Jesus Christ** to all who believe."

Jesus tells His listeners to believe *in the gospel*. The gospel was revolutionary in that it taught (1) that nobody could be saved by religious law keeping, or by one's own goodness; that (2) by God's grace, His Son was going to pay the penalty of sin; and (3) those who chose to believe in Him would be justified by that faith and be given the free gift of eternal life. Not all believed in this plan then, and not all will believe it today. Those that do believe the good news of the gospel, will exercise the plan of the gospel by *having faith in Christ*. It takes faith in the plan to place faith in Jesus, thus *faith to faith*.

THE WRATH OF GOD:

Key to having the faith which will save is first realizing the **danger** one is in due to **sin**. Paul begins verse 18 with the word 'for' to connect the good news of the gospel to the **wrath of God**. This is done to show us that understanding sin is the foundation upon which the good news of the gospel rests. With no sin there is no bad news, and there is no need for good news – there is no need to be saved.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven
against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men
who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. (1:18)

God's wrath (*orge*, to swell) is a natural disposition, a temper, an agitation of soul against that which is not right. It is His righteous anger directed at the evil and injustice of mankind. It will burst upon the unrighteousness of those who insist to ignore the truth and follow their own desires. God's wrath is not a popular subject: "The fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society, and Christians by and large have accepted the taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter."¹ Perhaps this is one of the reasons why so few respond to the gospel today.

**UNDERSTANDING SIN IS
THE FOUNDATION UPON
WHICH THE GOOD NEWS
OF THE GOSPEL RESTS**

Yet it is this subject which recurs² in Romans to demonstrate the need for God's grace. Paul will finish chapter one showing how the Gentiles fall under the condemnation of sin. Then in chapter two Paul will turn to the Jews, showing that they are condemned by the Law. Finally, he concludes in chapter three, "that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin,"³ "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."⁴ The gospel is the only solution. It reveals God's plan to save man by His grace.

It is this theme which Paul speaks of throughout the book. First he establishes the need (ch. 1-3), then explains the gospel plan of grace through faith (ch. 4-6), then he turns to the practical results (ch 7-10), answers objections (ch. 9-11), and finishes with practical applications (ch. 12-15). Study this book as though God is talking to you. In the end you will find that was the case all along.

¹ J. I. Packer: Knowing God, p. 149

² Romans 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22

³ Romans 3:9-10

⁴ Romans 3:23
