

Romans 1:16-17

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Paul boldly preaches the gospel because it is the power of God for all who believe. Initially, faith saves us from hell, but for the believer, faith continues to allow us to live righteous lives through the resurrection power of Christ.

In the previous section Paul stated his eagerness to preach the gospel to the believers in Rome, believers who were already world-famous for their faith (Romans 1:8). Paul now asserts *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* (vs 16). By saying *I am not ashamed of the gospel*, Paul is saying that the *gospel* is great news, and he is proud to share it with people. It is greatly for their benefit.

Paul makes clear that he is bold in proclaiming *the gospel* of Jesus (v 16). Why? Because the good news of Jesus contains the *power* for *salvation*.

The Greek word translated *salvation* is “*soteria*.” “*Soteria*” appears in Romans five times. Romans 13:11 says it is high time we wake up because “our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.” This helps us understand what Paul means by *salvation* or “save.”

Many think of “save” as being limited to the moment when a believer first trusts in Jesus to save him or her from their sin and the penalty of eternal separation from God. They think of salvation as being limited to the moment when we are born anew of the Spirit.

But Romans 13:11 says that “now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.” This verse says that every day we live, while we get further away from the point of our initial salvation, we are getting “*nearer*” or closer to our salvation. This is because Paul is speaking of the kind of salvation that delivers us from the presence of sin; when we are glorified with a new body. Salvation means “something is delivered from something” and what is being delivered from what is determined by context. The Greek word “*sozo*” is usually translated “save” but is also translated “get well” when someone is delivered from a disease (Mark 8:35).

This shows that *salvation* is not a technical term—a word that means the same thing regardless of context. The *salvation* we Christians are getting closer to every day in Romans 13:11 is the salvation from our sin-filled earthly bodies when they are replaced with new resurrected bodies. *Salvation* or *save* simply means “something is being delivered from something” and the context determines “what is being delivered from what.”

Salvation of our lives or souls has three tenses: past, present and future:

- In the past we were saved from the penalty of sin when we first believed. That is a salvation that is a gift of God received by faith (John 3:14-15). It is a gift that can neither be earned or lost.

- In the future, we will be saved from the presence of sin, when we are resurrected and receive a new body (Romans 13:11). This is the future tense.
- In the present, we are always being saved from the adverse consequences of the power of sin when we walk by faith in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 6:8).

In Romans, Paul's primary concern is for these Roman believers who have already received deliverance from the eternal penalty of sin and are already walking in faith to continue to walk each day in the power of the resurrection of Jesus by faith.

Paul hopes that in doing so, they will be delivered from the power of sin. Sin brings defeat and loss to us. Paul will soon make clear that the consequences of sin are profoundly negative; they lead to death and self-destruction (Romans 6:23). And Paul desperately wants us to avail ourselves of the resurrection power within us, and gain the great rewards of faith (Romans 14:12).

Verses 16 and 17 are, appropriately, often considered the theme or thesis statement of the book of Romans,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it (the gospel) is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

The *it* referred to here is the good news or *gospel* of Jesus. The good news is much, much more than just the reality that by simple trust in the work of Jesus on our behalf of bearing our sins on the cross, we can be delivered forever from the penalty of sin. The great news is also that we can experience the resurrected power of the life of Jesus in daily living through walking by faith. That is what this book is mainly about: how to experience a life where Jesus's resurrection power defines who we are and how we live.

The phrase *the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith* (v 17) is a key phrase. Our new life in Jesus begins when we trust in His finished work on the cross as our only hope of heaven. But that is just the beginning (*from faith*). The rest of our life is to be marked by faith as well, for that is how we appropriate the resurrection power of the risen Jesus for daily living (*to faith*).

As it is written (v 17) refers to what we call the "Old Testament" which at this time was most of the Holy Scriptures referred to in 1:2, since the New Testament had not yet been completed.

This quote *But the righteous man shall live by faith* is from Habakkuk 2:4. In chapters 1 and 2 of Habakkuk, the prophet Habakkuk asks God why He is allowing injustice to go unpunished in Israel, and God answers that He plans to bring the Babylonians to attack Israel in order to chastise them. "How is that just," wonders Habakkuk, "when the Babylonians are even worse?"

God answers that there are two ways to live, one is by human pride, faith in self and mankind. The other is by faith in the true and living God. That is where real justice comes from when we trust God and walk in obedience to Him:

“Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous shall live by his faith.”
(Habakkuk 2:4)

We will learn from Romans how to walk in faith so that our lives are truly just. To live justly is to live consistent with God’s perfect design. When we live according to God’s design, we fulfill the purpose for which we were created. This is the path to our greatest fulfillment.

To be able to walk in faith, we must first receive the free gift of God's grace by faith. That is the beginning faith in the phrase *from faith to faith*. But while that initial faith is what brings us the gift of a resurrected life, our opportunity to experience that gift worked out in our daily existence requires a living faith each day. This is the second faith in the phrase *from faith to faith*, and that is the faith Paul will primarily teach about in this book.

This makes sense, given that the audience here is a group of believers whose faith is spoken of “throughout the whole world” (v 8).

Biblical Text

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.”