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A1418 – May 4, 2014 – Romans 1:16-16
The Gospel Of Righteousness By Faith

In the Book of Romans Paul has directed us immediately to the very heart of his letter in the first verse; it is the gospel of God which in verse 2 is ancient, having been promised by God through His prophets in the OT scriptures. In verse 3 the gospel centers on God's Son who was of Davidic descent according to the human flesh and who in verse 4 was vindicated to be the Son of God through the power of the resurrection. In verse 5 it was through the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ that Paul received grace and his apostleship which was designed to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles. In verse 6 those believers at Rome were among the Gentiles who had responded by faith and were now the called of Jesus Christ and in verse 7 the beloved of God, called saints. So the aim of the letter is to give a systematic presentation of the all-encompassing gospel to those who had believed at Rome in preparation for Paul's coming.

In verse 11 Paul longed to visit the saints at Rome in order to benefit them spiritually as well as be benefited. He also in verses 14-15 was eager to preach the gospel to them even though in verse 8, they already had a tremendous testimony to the world. In verse 13 he was certain that the time had arrived for him to successfully come to Rome to preach the gospel. Why did the gospel need to be preached to them if they were already believers? In short, because the gospel is the deliverance power of God and there are many dangers to be delivered from; unbelievers need to be delivered from the danger of the penalty of sin; believers need to be delivered from the danger of the power of sin. Just because someone is a believer does not mean they are free and clear from danger. We still have the dangers of this world, our flesh and the devil to be delivered from. Continuing to believe the gospel is the necessary ingredient in being delivered from these dangers.

This gospel, as we will find out, is broader and more comprehensive than most Christians are willing to recognize; it addresses the three tenses of salvation; the **past** tense we refer to as *justification*, it is a legal *imputation* of righteousness to the sinner's account, it delivers a person from the penalty of sin, the **present** tense we refer to as *sanctification*, it is the *impartation* of righteousness to the believer, it delivers the believer from the power of sin and the **future** tense we refer to as *glorification*, it is the *inherent* righteousness that we are in the resurrection, it delivers the believer from the presence of sin altogether. So the gospel is the power of God unto deliverance in all three tenses. This is why the gospel needs to continually be preached to all men, believers and unbelievers.

Verses 16-17 are the theme of the letter. Paul presents a broad and sweeping theme that encompasses the message of the entire book. Seven great words are used by the apostle in the theme verses, each needing careful attention and definition; gospel, power, God, salvation, faith, righteousness and life. Strikingly one word is absent: Jesus Christ. However, we know from verse 3 that the gospel centers on Jesus Christ. Yet what we do see is that God is mentioned and this tips us off that what Paul is doing in verses 16-17 is elaborating on verse 2, the gospel of God, that is, the good news concerning His Son who was born of a descendant of David and raised from the dead, by whom we receive grace.

Now the theme begins in verse 16 as an explanation for why in verse 15 Paul was so eager to preach the gospel to those at Rome. **For I am not ashamed of the gospel.** The Greek word for **ashamed** (*ἐπαισχύνομαι*) means "to fear a loss of status." Paul was not afraid to lose his status when preaching the gospel at Rome. Why might Paul have reason to fear loss of status by preaching the gospel at Rome? Because Rome was the great world stage. In it the Emperor sat on his majestic throne and was worshipped as a god. The masses travelled to Rome for its majesty, its games, and its power. To go to Rome and preach a Savior who was crucified under the power of Rome would be an intimidating prospect indeed. Yet Paul proclaims boldly that he was **not ashamed** to preach there. There is, of course, often fear and trembling whenever delivering the message, but the nature of the gospel is so great that it gives entire confidence wherever it is presented, Rome was no exception.

To whom did Paul intend to preach the gospel in Rome? He intends to preach it to both believers and unbelievers. As to unbelievers, when Paul actually arrived in Rome, Acts 28 reports that “after three days” he called together the leading men of the Jews. These Jews were clearly unbelievers since they desired to hear Paul’s views and what he thought about the new Christian sect which was being spoken against. When Paul explained it some were persuaded but others would not believe. Then he went to the Gentiles. So clearly Paul intended to preach the gospel in Rome to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. Those who believed it were justified, instantly declared righteous and delivered from the penalty of sin. But Paul also wanted to preach the gospel to the believers at Rome. Lopez says, “Specially important in understanding this verse and the book of Romans as a whole is how the word *gospel* is used in 1:15. Looking at the immediate context, the plural *you* (*hymin*) appears ten times, each referring to the Roman believers (1:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 [twice]). But how can Paul preach the gospel to “saints” (1:7) whose “faith is spoken throughout the world” (v 8)? This implies the *gospel* in Romans includes a much broader concept than merely justification (cf. v 1).”ⁱ So Paul intended to preach the gospel to both unbelievers and believers in Rome. Seeing that the gospel is the power of God to deliver from peril then it is obvious that both unbelievers and believers face peril. The peril that an unbeliever faces is eternal separation from God. The peril that a believer faces is temporal separation from God, i.e. fellowship and resultant divine discipline. Through believing the gospel God delivers each from their respective peril. Therefore Paul intended to preach the gospel to both groups so they could be delivered. This is why Paul was not **ashamed of the gospel**. He wanted men to be delivered from the perils of sin and the gospel is the power of God unto that end.

Unfortunately there are many of us who are **ashamed** of the gospel when it comes right down to it. Ultimately we are afraid that if we proclaim the gospel we will experience a loss of status, that it will somehow affect our reputation negatively or that it will cost us something in the long run. There are many reasons we might be **ashamed** to proclaim the gospel but at the heart of all the reasons is our sense that if we share it we will somehow lose status in the eyes of the ones we’re sharing it with, whether they are unbelievers or believers. To unbelievers we might just say, “Better luck next time or just try harder,” to believers we might justify their failures by saying,

“God accepts us, warts and all.” These messages are not the gospel, they show we are ashamed of the gospel.

But Paul was not ashamed to preach the gospel to anyone. Why? **Because** verse 16, **it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.** In short the saving power of the gospel is sourced in God who makes it efficacious to all who are believing it. Let’s break it down into its component parts because just as the gospel in Romans is broader than men think so salvation in Romans is broader than men tend to think. First, the gospel is potential power, not kinetic power or inherent power. The Greek has four words for **power**; *ισχυς*, *κρατος*, *δυναμις*, and *ενεργεια*. Each has a distinct meaning. One means inherent strength, another a demonstration of strength, another kinetic energy and finally another potential energy. The one used here is *δυναμις* and means “potential energy.”ⁱⁱ Potential energy is the ability to do work, it has the potential to do work. When we lay in bed we have in our muscles potential energy, the ability to get up. When we do get up the potential energy is transferred into “kinetic energy,” energy in motion, energy at work. The gospel is like our muscles as we lay in bed, it has the potential to save, but it does not save as long as the person does not believe it. If the person in view is an unbeliever then the gospel does not save them from the penalty of sin until they believe it. Christ died for them but this news must be appropriated in order to be saved; if the person in view is a believer then the gospel does not save them from the power of sin unless they are believing it, it also must be appropriated.

It is very important to understand that the gospel is only potential power and not kinetic. With respect to unbelievers it is important because there are two views of how the gospel saves an unbeliever. The first view is that of Lordship. The Lordship view says that the gospel saves the elect by first regenerating them unconditionally, that is, without human faith. They say that regeneration precedes faith and is the root and ground of it. Faith, in this view, is a gift of God in the sense that the person must be regenerated before they can believe. Then, once they believe they are justified. If this view were true Paul would not have used the Greek word *δυναμις* to describe the gospel but he would have used the Greek word *ενεργεια*. It would mean that the gospel is the kinetic power of God to regenerate the elect independent of belief. John 3 and Eph 2 are the main passages used to support this view. The argument is that since dead men can’t believe then God must make them

alive (i.e. regenerate them) first in order that they may believe. So the logical order is regeneration-faith-justification. However, even in the passages used to support this view faith is the condition for regeneration not the other way around (cf John 3:16ff; Eph 2:8). The scriptural testimony is that a person must believe in order to be justified and regenerated, faith comes first in the logical order. The fear of the Lordship camp is that if a man believes then he has added a work to the gospel. However, the Scriptures say that belief is not a work but the opposite of work (Rom 4:5). The second view is that of Free Grace. The Free Grace view argues that the gospel has the potential to save all men but it only actually saves those who believe. In this view, faith precedes justification and regeneration logically though in time when a person exercises faith they are justified and regenerated simultaneously. In this view God provides pre-salvation works of the Spirit in order to draw men to Himself so that they will believe (John 6:45; 16:8-11; Titus 2:13-14). So the logical order is faith-justification-regeneration. Which view is Paul's view? The Free Grace view. Paul says that the gospel is the potential power of God. When an unbeliever meets the condition of believing the gospel that potential is unleashed and God saves the person.

The same problem exists with respect to believers and how the gospel saves a believer from the power of sin, that is, how a believer is sanctified. The first view again is Lordship salvation. They argue that the gospel sanctifies unconditionally; that is, without the human condition of faith being met. In their view sanctification is essentially automatic. They don't deny that men must play some role in their sanctification but the role we play is guaranteed so in essence it is automatic. They downplay the essential role of faith. Again, if this were true Paul would not have used the Greek word *dunamis* but *energeia*. The second view again is Free Grace. They argue that the gospel sanctifies conditionally, that is, upon the human meeting the condition of faith. In this view sanctification is not automatic but occurs when the believer is living by faith. Our ability to live by faith is connected with our hearing of the word of God. So the role of the word and faith take on a greater importance. Which view is correct? Again, the Free Grace view is Paul's view. He says that the gospel is the potential power of God. When a believer meets the condition of living by faith the potential power in the gospel is unleashed as God sanctifies the person. So the first point is that the gospel is potential power, it does not automatically save in either tense of salvation, it saves on the condition that the person has faith.

Second, the power is of God. The gospel is not what is powerful. There is no power intrinsic to the gospel. The gospel is a message in human language. The power is intrinsic to the God who is behind the gospel. Because He is the one who speaks it, it has power. This is why when God spoke at creation saying, "Let there be light" something came into existence out of nothing but if you say the same words nothing happens. The difference is not in the words themselves but in the one who the words are sourced in. The gospel is the power of God and that is why the gospel saves even through our preaching of it.

Third, the gospel is unto salvation. Salvation means "deliverance from some danger." There are many dangers, physical and spiritual. In the Book of Romans salvation is all-encompassing; it may refer to physical deliverance from danger or spiritual deliverance from danger. If unbelievers are in view, as in Romans 4-5 then salvation refers to justification, the imputation of righteousness which delivers from the penalty of sin. If believers are in view, as in Romans 6-8 then the salvation is sanctification, the impartation of righteousness which delivers from the power of sin or it is glorification, the inherent righteousness that we are in the resurrection when we are delivered from the presence of sin altogether. If the nation Israel is in view, as in Romans 9-11 then the salvation is either justification, the imputation of righteousness and deliverance from the penalty of sin or physical deliverance from their enemies in the end times. So the salvation in Romans is very broad but the gospel is also very broad and therefore the gospel is always unto salvation, whether physical or spiritual.

Fourth, God saves everyone who believes. This is a universal statement of the condition that one must meet in order for God to save them. Anyone and everyone who believes the gospel will be saved by God. If the person is an unbeliever and they believe then they are justified, saved from the penalty of sin. If the person is a believer and they believe then they are sanctified, saved from the power of sin. If the nation Israel is in view and they believe then they are justified, saved from the penalty of sin or they are physically delivered from their enemies in the end times. But in every case the salvation is conditioned on belief. God never saves through anything else, it is not water baptism, it is not repentance from sin, it is not doing good works, it is not confessing our sins, it is not praying for Jesus to come into our heart. God

does not save through any of these things. God only and always saves through one thing; faith and faith alone. Not how clearly Paul puts it in verse 16, **to everyone who believes**. Therefore everyone who believes is saved from peril.

Now verse 16 closes with a controversial expression; **to the Jew first and also to the Greek**. By **Jew** Paul is referring to racial Jews, those who are physical descendants of Jacob. By **Greek** Paul is referring to the Gentile world which in verse 14 he divided into Greek and barbarian, but here he puts both groups under Greek. His meaning is “non-Jews.” So by **Jew and Greek** Paul is referring to the whole of mankind. Before the controversy we would like to say the most important thing and that is that salvation is to Jew and Gentile on the same condition, namely, faith. There is no difference in this respect between Jew and Gentile, neither has an advantage or disadvantage, both are given the same gospel and both are called to exercise faith. Upon exercising it they are saved.

The controversy in verse 16 is over the word **first** (*πρῶτος*) - **to the Jew first**. What does Paul mean **to the Jew first**? The first view is the minority view. One adherent is Messianic Jew Arnold Fruchtenbaum. This view says that the word “first” indicates an order of procedure. The gospel should go to the Jew first as a normal procedure for evangelism today. This view says on Rom 1:16 that if the gospel is the power of God today then it must also be to the Jew first today since both expressions are controlled by the same present tense verb. Joining this doctrinal verse with the great commission one would always go to the Jew first and then to Gentiles. It argues that in the Book of Acts Paul consistently went to the Jew first even though he was the apostle to the Gentiles showing that the doctrine of “to the Jew first” took preference over his individual calling. Paul’s practice it is argued, should be our practice, we should always search out the Jew first whenever we preach the gospel anywhere. This is not a matter of preference but of procedure. It says that if a local church follows this procedure in its missionary practices then it will receive blessings that it could not receive in any other way. So the first view says that “to the Jew first” is describing an order of procedure, the normal practice in all situations is to take the gospel to the Jew first.

The second view is the majority view. It is held by the excellent Bible teacher, George Zeller, of Middletown Bible Church. This view says that the word

"first" indicates an order of sequence. The gospel went to the Jew first historically, according to Acts 1:8. In other words, the outworking of the great commission historically was to the Jew first, then to the Gentiles. The book of Acts illustrates that the great commission began in Jerusalem and then went out into Judea and Samaria and eventually to the remotest parts of the earth. When Paul wrote Romans this outworking was still in progress. Paul repeatedly went to the synagogue first in each city he visited on his missionary journeys in Acts in order to give the Jews the opportunity to fulfill their calling to be a light to all nations. This view argues that over time it became increasingly obvious that the Jews did not want to fulfill their calling. Therefore Paul's practices are not the norm today. The gospel should be preached to all men, whether Jew or Gentile, without seeking out the Jew first in a given area. So the second view says that "to the Jew first" is describing the order of sequence that the gospel went forth historically, but that the normal practice today is to take the gospel to all nations without distinction.

Which view is the best? Probably the second view. It should be noted that Romans 1:16 is not a command but a statement. It states that the gospel is to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. This is a statement of history not a command for procedure. Nowhere are we commanded to go to the Jew first. We are commanded to go make disciples of all nations. So what appears to be the case is that in the historical outworking of the great commission the gospel did go to the Jewish people first. However, when they rejected the focus turned to those who were receiving it, the Gentiles. I therefore see no necessity laid on us to go to the Jew first today. Consistent with verse 16, the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, this goes for Jew and Gentile alike. Today we should preach the gospel to all men, whether Jew or Gentile.

In summary of the first half of the theme of Romans, Paul was eager to preach the gospel at Rome. This would be a daunting task because Rome was the center of the world stage. Yet Paul was not deterred. He rises to the occasion because the gospel is the power of God unto deliverance from peril in all three tenses; for the unbeliever it is the power to deliver from the penalty of sin which is eternal separation from God by justifying him, imputing the perfect righteousness of Christ to his account; to the believer it is the power to deliver from the power of sin which is temporal loss of fellowship with God

by sanctifying him, imparting the righteousness of Christ through him. In short, the gospel is indeed the power of God, whenever anyone believes He makes it efficacious unto salvation. In the historical outworking the gospel went to the Jew first in sequence and then to the Greek. There is no necessity laid on us today to repeat this historical outworking. The gospel is to go to all nations, both Jew and Greek.

The first application is clear; do not be ashamed of the gospel. If it is the power of God to save men then why are you ashamed to preach it? Second, if you are an unbeliever then you are in peril of eternal separation from God. However, if you believe the gospel right now then God's power will be unleashed to deliver you from this peril by imputing Christ's righteousness to your account. Third, if you are a believer then you are in peril of temporal separation from God, or loss of fellowship and consequent divine discipline, if you live by faith then God's power will be unleashed to deliver you from this peril by imparting Christ's righteousness to you in the fruit of the Spirit.

¹ Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, p 37-8.

¹ It is the word from which we get "dynamite," "dynamo" and "dynamic." The gospel is not really dynamite in the sense of explosive, destructive power.

¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Ro 1:16). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

¹ Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Ro 1:17). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

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ⁱ Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, p 37-8.

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