

Dear Friends,

The New Testament is far, far more than a nice "Howdy folks. How are you doing?" collection of letters. Each book in the New Testament was written with purpose and with substance to address needed spiritual correction or guidance for the early believers to whom that letter was first written. And 2 Timothy 3:16-17 should constantly remind us that these books, "Scripture" were written to and for "the man of God." Our Bible is God's personal "Letter" to His people for their instruction and guidance "unto all good works." When I hear people who claim to be informed and believing Bible students refer to a major spiritual need and casually quip, "Well, the Bible doesn't say anything about that, so we are free to think or do as we wish," I cringe. Have they never read these two verses from Paul to the young preacher Timothy? Do they not understand what "**all good works**" means? I fear this attitude grows out of conscious, deliberate "Willful ignorance." Believers are obligated to exemplify respect for and belief in the words of Scripture, especially Scripture's self-description of its content and purpose.

Paul's letter to the Romans is one of the New Testament's giants in terms of both doctrinal, eternal truths, including our eternal salvation, as well as doctrinal practical, "How to" instructions for the walk of faith. Lord help us to read and to study its contents frequently and prayerfully.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Romans

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. (Romans 1:8-10 KJV 1900)

All the New Testament church and personal letters are "Occasional" writings; they were written to teach, correct, or clarify problems or errors that surfaced (The "Occasion" for the writing. Each letter addresses various problems facing individual churches. These letters were not casual letters from a preacher to his church friends.). In Romans, Paul devotes much time to two major issues; 1) the centrality of "Faith" to the gospel and to the "Faithful" life we should live in the gospel, and 2) significant questions or confusion regarding the "Jew-Gentile" tension that frequently appears from Acts through Jude.

In Acts 18:1-2, Luke mentions that the Roman emperor Claudius Caesar had recently "...commanded all Jews to depart from Rome." There is a brief reference to this event in the writings of the Roman historian Suetonius.

Suetonius (Life of Claudius 25.4) tells us that the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation "of Chrestus," and Claudius therefore banished them from Rome in A.D. 49. It is possible that Chrestus (meaning "the useful one") is a Roman misunderstanding of Christus, a term that was meaningless to Romans. If so, this means that the gospel of Christ was being preached in the Jewish synagogues in

Rome and was meeting such strenuous resistance that Claudius ordered all Jews to leave the city. (The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament)

Quite likely Jewish believers in the church may have also been expelled by the Roman decree for all Jews to leave Rome. If these believers later returned to Rome, they would have expected their church to be the same as it was when they left. How might they react if they discovered that the Gentile believers who remained in the city had changed the culture (Not the faith of the gospel) to a more “Gentile” culture? You would expect a lot of tensions, schism, and questions. This scenario offers one possible reason for Paul’s emphasis in Romans on the obvious questions regarding the culture of the New Testament Church. Should it attempt to preserve the old cultural divide between Jewish believers and non-Jews? Or should the New Testament Church be a welcoming place for believers regardless their culture, ancestry, or language?

Frequently throughout Romans, Paul will weave these two major themes together. For my focus, suffice it to observe his teaching at the end of Romans 2.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. (Romans 2:28-29 KJV 1900)

Sinful broken people look on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart, especially on hearts that He has changed. Regardless the color of a person’s skin or the language they speak, God looks on hearts once blackened by the stain of sin, but the blood of His Son was applied to those hearts and left them pure white as snow. (Galatians 6:15 KJV)

We turn now to the major theme of the letter, the way of faith for the child of God. Do not forget our previous anchor, firmly planted in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. God didn’t provide the writings of Scripture for unsaved people but for **“the man of God,”** a thorough guide to and for His people. The real “Romans Road” is not a path for lost sinners to accomplish their own salvation, but rather a path for children of God to learn about their Savior and His guiding light for their lives, truly “The walk of faith.”

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:16-17 KJV 1900)

Follow Paul’s lead. The gospel is God’s power to save believers, not to save non-believers. Given Jesus’ teaching in John 5:24 and John’s in 1 John 5:1, the New Testament firmly teaches that anyone who

believes is already born again. Applying this teaching to this text leads us to conclude that the gospel is God's power to save saved people. Perhaps a shocking idea for many, but no surprise for the thinking Bible student. Study the following passage as well.

*Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may **also** obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.* (2 Timothy 2:10 KJV 1900; emphasis added)

Again, follow Paul's reasoning. He gladly endured fierce trials and persecutions "**for the elect's sake.**" He didn't write a single word about enduring anything for the non-elect's sake, did he? Nor did he write a word about preaching to convince non-elect people to become elected people, a populist contemporary idea. And why such determined endurance? First, notice what these people already have, "**with eternal glory.**" They already possess God's sure provision for eternal glory. Paul didn't endure anything to gain eternal glory for them; they already had it. Oh, more than we can imagine was done to secure that eternal glory for the elect, but Jesus paid the full price for it in His sufferings and death. He left nothing, not a penny, for the elect to pay.

But Paul's enduring "*all things*" did open the door for regenerate elect, people already saved and possessing their title to "eternal glory," to "**Obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.**" They are in Christ Jesus. They already have their present experience of "eternal glory." But they must labor ("Obtain" is an active voice verb, indicating it refers to something the elect must do if they hope to experience that "**salvation which is in Christ Jesus.**")

Contemporary believers who hold to salvation by works or salvation by a mixture of works and grace might well read this verse and think Paul was reasoning in double-speak. Saved people need to be saved. But that is precisely what Paul—under the Holy Spirit's direction—wrote. Consider. This salvation is "**in Christ Jesus.**" The sphere where it is to be experienced is "*in Christ Jesus.*" Paul wrote no suggestion that people out of Jesus might do something to alter their standing to "in Christ Jesus." No, beginning to end, this salvation is "**in Christ Jesus.**" It is for born again children of God who need to hear, believe, and transform their lives by the powerful "Faith" factor of the gospel.

Back to Romans. It is significant that Paul quoted a particular Old Testament passage.

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The common Old Testament read—and quoted—by New Testament inspired writers was the Septuagint (LXX) Greek translation of the Old Testament. Paul's quote, "*as it is written,*" is from Habakkuk 2:4. How does that verse read in the LXX?

*If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him: but **the just shall live by my faith.*** (Habakkuk 2:4 Brenton LXX, emphasis added)

Two major points stand out in this reference. The people described by Habakkuk were not unjust people who imagined doing something to become just. **They were just (Or justified) already.** And their walk, their habitual lifestyle, was described, “*shall live by,*” as a rule of life or of one’s conduct, “**my faith.**” The question begs an answer. Whose faith? Who is the speaker in Habakkuk’s prophecy? It is God Himself. The rule of life, the lifestyle, of the justified person is not to be his personal opinion or his private interpretation of Scripture. It is to be the “Faith of God,” or the “**Faithfulness of God,**” not the believer’s faithfulness.

In Hebrews 12:2, we read that Jesus is “*the author and finisher of our faith.*” He wrote the title page to the “Book of faith” for His children, and He wrote the final word. He is the Author of the faith of every Old Testament saint whose faith is highlighted in Hebrews 11, and He wrote the book for your and my faith. Faith in our own faith or in anything or person other than the Lord Jesus is faith in a counterfeit of the authentic “Book of faith.”

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. I love the amazing precision of Bible language. This lesson is not about faith being created by the gospel. It is about the gospel “**Revealing**” the righteousness of God to born again people, “**from faith to faith.**” Beginning to end, first to last, the gospel stands on the firm anchor of the righteousness of God, and it teaches regenerate people to trust Jesus and His righteousness, not their own, for their salvation **and** for their life-guide.

After proving that all humanity apart from God are undeserving sinners (Romans chapters one and two), in Romans 3, Paul summarizes this point and moves forward to teach us about the faithfulness of God in accomplishing our salvation.

In Chapter 4, he will turn to the walk of faith, God’s appointed guide for His children, using both Abraham and David as examples in the opening verses, though he will emphasize Abraham’s exemplary faith in the body of his teaching in this chapter. Abraham was not saved by his faith in Genesis 15:6. He walked by this exemplary faith from the time he left Ur of the Chaldees in the closing verses of Genesis 11, as clearly taught in Hebrews 11:8. Genesis 15 is some twenty or more years too late to teach about Abraham’s salvation experience.

From this foundation, Paul will reason between foundation, God and His faithful work for and in His people, to the completed building, to its application, that faithfulness exemplified in the life of regenerate children of God who hear, believe, and practice the gospel. Lord help and convict each of us to learn about our “Faithful” foundation of salvation and faith in Jesus, and to practice His faith—and faithfulness—in honor to Him and for His glory.

Elder Joe Holder