

THE GREATEST MESSAGE EVER PROCLAIMED ROMANS 1:16–17

INTRODUCTION

As I have contended throughout our series so far,
Romans is the greatest letter ever written.

That is because, as **John Stott** put it, “*It is the fullest, plainest and grandest statement of the gospel in the New Testament.*”¹

In other words, Romans is the greatest letter ever written because it contains **the clearest and most detailed explanation** of the gospel in Scripture.

I’ve also argued that the gospel is **the greatest message ever proclaimed** because it **announces the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived.**

To define it simply, the gospel is the good news of God’s work of saving His people through Jesus Christ.

He does that according to **the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived.**

Therefore, the gospel is **the greatest message ever proclaimed** and the best news you will ever receive.

So Romans is the greatest letter ever written because it **explains and applies and exults/ rejoices in the greatest message ever proclaimed.**

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 19.

All of that **superlative language** is meant to **capture the glory of the gospel** as Paul explains it in the letter of Romans.

In other words, I hope that my enthusiasm for the gospel well **in some way reflect Paul's own enthusiasm.**

As we focus on **verses 16–17** in our study today, we should **remember the context** as Paul's enthusiasm for the gospel follows **verse 15** in which he declared—

In this way, for my part, I am eager to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

We learnt that Paul's plans to visit the church in Rome were **motivated by his love for the church.**

The apostle Paul valued relationships—he valued the **fellowship of the local church.**

He was planning to visit Rome so that both he and the believers there could be **strengthened and encouraged** through their fellowship as they loved and served one another.

Paul's eagerness, as he expresses it in **verse 15**, to proclaim the gospel in Rome is then certainly a **reflection of his love for the church.**

But as we'll see today, it is **also a reflection of his love for the message of the gospel.**

Paul was **enthusiastic about the gospel**—he delighted in it, rejoiced in it, exulted in it, because he believed that it was the greatest message ever proclaimed.

In short, **Paul loved the gospel.**

That's why, when Paul spoke of his “**obligation**” in **verse 14**, it was **not only an obligation** expressing his love for the people of God.

It was **also an obligation to the message**, because he was **enthusiastic to proclaim** the good news of God's work of saving His people through Jesus Christ.

As he writes elsewhere in **1 Corinthians 9:16**—

For if I proclaim the gospel, I have nothing to boast, for I am under compulsion. For woe is me if I do not proclaim the gospel.

Turn quickly to **Ephesians 3:8-12**—

⁸ **To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ,**

⁹ **and to bring to light for all what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;**

¹⁰ **so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.**

¹¹ **This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,**

¹² **in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.**

As Paul says here in **verse 8**, he viewed his ministry of preaching the good news, of proclaiming the gospel, as a **gracious gift from God**.

Turn back to **Romans 1**, and **notice** that this idea of proclaiming the gospel being a gift, or a privilege, is reflected even in Paul's statement in **verse 5** that **his apostolic ministry was given to him as a gracious gift**.

Once again, Paul was enthusiastic about the gospel as the greatest message ever proclaimed.

Paul loved the gospel, if you don't that you don't understand the apostle Paul.

His life was transformed by the gospel, and his ministry was focused on the gospel, and as we will see in our study of **verses 16–17** today, Paul declared that **he gloried in the gospel and counted it the highest honour to proclaim it.**²

If we're honest though, we don't always share Paul's enthusiasm for the gospel.

Through simple neglect and the distraction of life's daily pressures and priorities, it's far too easy to let your heart grow cold toward the gospel.

² F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 85.

Whether you no longer rejoice in God's work of saving you through Jesus Christ as you did when you were first converted, or you are not enthusiastic about evangelising others with the gospel,

Paul's love for the gospel is a **reminder that you and I should be enthusiastic** about the greatest message ever proclaimed.

**We must share in Paul's enthusiasm for the gospel;
we must share in Paul's love for the gospel**

And the best way to rekindle our hearts is to **understand the gospel as Paul did**.

If you share in Paul's view of the gospel as the greatest message ever proclaimed because it announces the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived, then you will be **sure to share in Paul's enthusiasm** for the gospel.

In **verses 16–17**, Paul announces his enthusiasm for the gospel and **provides us with his thesis for the letter**.

We have already established that **the gospel is the theme** of Paul's letter to the Romans.

There is much that Paul is going to write in order to explain and apply the gospel in greater detail, but in **verses 16–17** Paul **announces the big idea** that he wants to communicate.

From Paul's introduction, we already know that the gospel is **from God and about His saving work** through Jesus Christ.

Now Paul announces his enthusiasm because the gospel is the **means by which God is effectually saving His people.**

The gospel is the means by which God is effectually saving His people **because it reveals God's work of providing righteousness for His people through faith.**

As **John Stott** put it so brilliantly, the gospel reveals,
“*God’s righteous way of ‘righteousing’ the unrighteous.*”³

To put that another way, the **heart of the gospel is God’s justifying of unrighteous** individuals through faith in Christ.⁴

The heart of the gospel is the **doctrine of justification by faith alone.**

The text before us today has, therefore, been **central to the Reformation** and is a clear biblical statement of the Reformation principle of ***Sola Fide*—faith alone.**

In fact, this text was **central to the conversion of Martin Luther.**

As Luther himself recounts, God opened his mind to understand the gospel as he studied the Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews—especially Romans 1:17.

³ Stott, *Romans*, 37.

⁴ “At the heart of Romans is justification.” Naselli, *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls*, 213.

Luther agonised over Paul’s meaning because he thought “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17 refers to the **exacting justice of God**—that God would eternally damn all sinners. He hated God for that.⁵

Luther had an **exegetical breakthrough** that led to his **understanding and acceptance** of God’s work of salvation according to the gospel.

As he wrote—

I had greatly longed to understand Paul’s letter to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, ‘the righteousness of God’, because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous....

Night and day I pondered until... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.

The whole of scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before “the righteousness of God” had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven.⁶

As we can then say, **Martin Luther shared in Paul’s enthusiasm** for the gospel as the greatest message ever proclaimed.

⁵ Andrew David Naselli, “The Righteous God Righteously Righteouses the Unrighteous: Justification according to Romans,” in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 217.

⁶ Bruce, *Romans*, 66.

PROPOSITION

So then, let's turn our attention to **the details of the text** and **the two reasons Paul gives** for his enthusiasm of the gospel.

Paul views the gospel as the greatest message ever proclaimed because **it is the power of God** to save His people and because **it is the righteousness of God** that He gives in justifying His people.

Or as we can even say simply, Paul is enthusiastic for the gospel because it is the **power of God in salvation** and the **righteousness of God in justification**.

Or simpler yet, **Paul loves the gospel because of the power of God and the righteousness of God**.

Two reasons why **you should love the gospel too**.

1. THE POWER OF GOD IN SALVATION (16)

If you look at **verse 16**, the **connecting word**, “**For**,” makes it clear that Paul is **continuing in his reasoning** from the preceding verses.

At the same time, we can also recognise that **verses 16–17** are a **transition** from Paul's introductory material to the body of the letter.

Therefore, they **not only complete** Paul's reason for visiting Rome, but they **also introduce** the thesis of the letter.

These verses **sum up Paul's “big idea”** that he will expand on through the letter.

Simply put, **verses 16–17** sum up for us **what God has done to bring us salvation**.⁷

They express Paul's enthusiasm for the gospel as the greatest message ever proclaimed, because it announces the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived.

That's why **one author** even claimed that we can see in them “a *summary of Paul's theology as a whole*.”⁸

Paul then opens his **thesis statement** in **verse 16** by declaring, **For I am not ashamed of the gospel...**
Turn to **Mark 8:34-38** where we will find **important background** to Paul's declaration in the words of Jesus—

⁷ Cf. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 66.

⁸ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Rev. ed., Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1991), 27.

34 **And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.**

35 **For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.**

36 **For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?**

37 **For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**

38 **For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”**

According to Jesus, no one can be ashamed of Him, or the gospel message about Him, and truly be one of His people.

Paul, the slave of Christ Jesus, could therefore never imagine being ashamed of Christ or His gospel **because his life was devoted to Christ.**

However, Paul means even more than that here.

Paul is using an **intentional understatement in the negative form** in order to emphasise the positive form.⁹

In other words, in saying, “I am not ashamed,” he means something like, **“I am extremely proud...”**

Paul was proud of the gospel and **considered it a privilege** to preach the good news message.¹⁰

⁹ Litotes—an understatement in the form of a negative statement. Cf. Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon, *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, ed. Lidija Novakovic, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023), 18.

¹⁰ Cf. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 22.

It is an expression of **confidence in the gospel**.

Paul was prepared to **confess the gospel publicly** and **bear witness to its saving power**.¹¹

In other words, Paul meant that he gloried in the gospel and counted it a high honour to proclaim it.¹²

Or simply, **Paul was enthusiastic about the gospel**—
he loved the gospel.

That is a **remarkable statement** when we think about what Paul faced in his ministry of the gospel—**circumstances that could easily tempt** anyone into a sense of **shame and reluctance** to proclaim the good news.

Paul had been beaten and imprisoned in **Philippi**, chased out of **Thessalonica** by an angry mob, smuggled out of **Berea**, laughed at by the social elites in **Athens**, and in **Corinth** his message was once again foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling-block to the Jews.¹³

In the face of these circumstances, Paul's **enthusiasm was undiminished**, and as he continues in **verse 16** he gives us the **first reason why**—

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 63.

¹² Bruce, *Romans*, 85.

¹³ Cf. Barclay, *Romans*, 22.

The gospel is not merely a message about salvation, but it is **God's means of salvation for His people.**

So Paul is not ashamed of his message, because he knows the gospel he preaches is **God's appointed means of bringing salvation to the world.**¹⁴

Turn in your Bibles to **Romans 10**. There you see Paul make **this argument in greater detail**, appealing even to the authority of the Old Testament to make his point.

In **verse 14** he asks,

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

And then in **verse 17** he sums up his argument by stating,

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

As Paul says here, it is the word, or **message, about Christ** which is the means by which a person responds with faith.

¹⁴ Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 51.

That's precisely what Paul is saying as we **turn back** to **Romans 1:16**.

The gospel is the means by which God saves both Jew and Gentile because the preaching of the gospel is **accompanied by the effective and transforming power of God**.

As **Tom Schreiner** put it, “*The preaching of the word does not merely make salvation possible but also effects salvation in those who are called.*”¹⁵

Now, that means that the gospel is the greatest message ever proclaimed, not just because of its **glorious content**, but because of the **power of God which accompanies it** in order to **accomplish** God's purpose of saving those whom He has eternally loved and chosen.¹⁶

No wonder Paul wasn't ashamed, regardless of what those who rejected his message thought.

No wonder Paul was enthusiastic about the gospel and considered it a privilege to proclaim it.

No wonder Paul loved the gospel.

Turn to the Old Testament, to **Isaiah 55**, so that I can show you where **Isaiah made the same point**.

¹⁵ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 64.

¹⁶ “Thus the Gospel itself is the operation of God's power working towards salvation; not merely an announcement of the fact that salvation will at some future time take place, but a divine activity or power leading to salvation.” Barrett, *Romans*, 28.

“The gospel is God's effective power active in the world of men to bring about deliverance from His wrath in the final judgment and reinstatement in that glory of God which was lost through sin.” C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 89.

Isaiah 55 is a **clear gospel invitation** that follows just after the magnificence of **Isaiah 53** in which the prophet detailed the redemptive work of the Messiah in the place of His people.

In **verse 1** there is the **invitation to receive freely by faith**—

Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Then in **verses 6–7**, there is the **offer of forgiveness** for all who will **repent and believe**—

6 Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Then, in **verses 10–11**, comes **God's declaration of His power** which accompanies His gospel message—

10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what pleases Me, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

That's why Paul loved the gospel, and why **you should love the gospel too** with the same enthusiasm to see it transform your life and the lives of those you evangelise.

Now, as we go back to **Romans 1**, we see the Paul tells us that the power of God accomplishes **“salvation.”**

What is this “**salvation**” that Paul is referring to here?

The basic idea behind the term is that of **deliverance, or rescue**.¹⁷

So to put it simply, God rescues people from the penalty of sin, which is spiritual death and eternal torment under His wrath.

We see this concept in **Romans 5:9** where Paul writes—

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

But we should think of “**salvation**” **both negatively and positively**, since God’s work of salvation is from sin and death unto righteousness and life.

We often use the term “**salvation**” as a **general term** to include redemption, justification, sanctification, and the ultimate end of glorification.¹⁸

That is because “**salvation**” can be used so broadly that the writers of the New Testament, like Paul, will use it in different contexts to refer to the **past, present, and future work of God**.

¹⁷ Louw & Nida, 21.18, σφζω/ σωτηρία.

¹⁸ Cf. Morris, *Romans*, 67.

In the letter of Romans, Paul uses the term in **Romans 8:24** to refer to the **past experience** of believers that **awaits a future** fulfillment or completion—

For in hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he already sees?

So without going into the detail of this verse, it's plain to see that we can speak of salvation **beginning** at the point of **conversion** and **continuing** until the work is **fully and finally complete**.

That is how Paul thought of “**salvation**,” as an **all-encompassing term** for God’s work of rescuing His people from sin and death unto righteousness and eternal life.

For Paul, though, **the past and present works** of salvation **find their significance in the future, final salvation**.

So he tended to focus on the future work of salvation more than anything else, as we see in **Romans 5:9** with his clear emphasis on the final and complete salvation we’re waiting for

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Now, as we use this to understand what Paul means in **Romans 1:16**, we should think of it as a **broad term** that includes God's work of beginning, continuing, and completing His rescue of those He has eternally loved and chosen.

Any future emphasis that Paul may introduce later in his letter serves to remind us that God **will not leave His work incomplete**—the power of God in the gospel will accomplish everything He has planned and purposed to do.

If you look again at **verse 16**, Paul clarifies that the **recipients** of God's saving work are **those who believe**.

This is the **simplest expression of the human response** that God requires from those who receive His salvation as promised in the gospel.

As it's expressed even in **John 3:16**—

God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

We also know from **Romans 1:5** that belief is not alone, and Paul expresses the response God required **more fully** with the phrase, **“the obedience of faith.”**

As we've learnt, that includes both the **initial response of faith** as an act of obedience, and the **continued response** of increasing obedience produced by faith.

Here in **verse 16**, Paul isn't denying the need for repentance and obedience, but **summarises all the God requires** as “believing.”

So then, God saves those who “believe,” that is, those who have the **saving faith of belief and personal trust** in Christ as prompted by God's grace.¹⁹

In fact, we know that Paul thinks of “believing” as synonymous with faith because of the parallel between **verse 16** and **verse 17**.

We'll say more on the subject when we look at **verse 17**, but for now what is important to note is that **God's power is not limited**

¹⁹ Cf. Gregg R. Allison, “Saving Faith,” in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 188.

in its effectiveness so that He can only save those who first respond by believing.

Rather, **God's power provides the very faith that He requires**, which is why the **gospel is effective to save** everyone whom God has chosen.

As **one commentator** states, "*It is not man's faith that gives the gospel its power; quite the contrary, it is the power of the gospel that makes it possible for one to believe.*"²⁰

As Paul says clearly in **Ephesians 2:8**—

By grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...

That's why Paul can **enthusiastically glory in the gospel** as the power of God!

That's why the gospel is the greatest message ever proclaimed because it announces the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived—**a plan that is wholly dependent on God.**

God does all the saving work; it is all a matter of his grace in Christ, **which is why He also gets all the glory.**

As Paul declares in his **doxology** of **Romans 11:36**—

From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Therefore, the gospel is the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived, that **leads to the greatest display of the glory of God ever possible.**

That's why Paul loved the gospel, and why you should love the gospel too!

²⁰ Anders Nygren, cited in Morris, *Romans*, 68–69.

Now finally, as we consider the remainder of what Paul writes in **verse 16**, providing us with the **first reason** why he is enthusiastic about the gospel, he says that the gospel is God's effective power to save, **“to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”**

What Paul says here is an **expansion** on **“everyone who believers.”**

Paul wants to emphasise the **universal scope of the gospel**—it is the power of God to save both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul states it is such a way that **underscores both the fundamental equality** of Jews and Gentiles in the face of the gospel, as well as a **certain undeniable priority** of the Jew.²¹

So while there is no distinction in that both Jews and Gentiles are **saved by the same gospel**, Paul will later explain in **chapters 9–11** that God's **purposes of election retain a priority for the nation of Israel**.

This is even reflected in **Paul's missionary practice** of visiting the synagogues before proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. **It was this very discussion** on God's salvation to both Jews and Gentiles the brought Paul to point of the triumphant doxology that we read earlier (**Romans 11:36**)—

From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

²¹ Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 91. BDF (444 [2]) draw attention to καὶ ... καὶ in 1 Cor. 10:32, “where the distinction between the members is retained, whereas with τε καὶ the distinction is rather set aside.”

Now as you put all this together, we can see a **very clear reason** why Paul was enthusiastic about the gospel—**because it is the power of God to save.**

Paul loved the gospel because it is the power of God in salvation.

But in **verse 17** we find that there is **a second reason too**—the gospel is **the righteousness of God in justification.**

2. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN JUSTIFICATION (17)

Once again, you can see in **verse 17** that Paul uses the **connecting word**, “**For**,” which makes it clear that Paul is continuing in his reasoning from **verse 16**.

Paul is going to explain **verse 16 in more detail** with **verse 17**— he is going to explain the first reason he loves the gospel in more detail with his second reason.

Paul writes that, “**For in it [that is, the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith...**”

Now as we learnt in **our overview of Romans**, if the **gospel is the theme** of the letter, then **the righteousness of God is the theology** of the letter.²²

It's critically important, then, to understand what Paul means by this phrase—“**the righteousness of God.**”

There are, in fact, **at least three basic options** of what Paul intends to communicate by this phrase:

1. What God is—God's attribute of being righteous or just.

Wayne Grudem defines this **perfection of God** in this way—

“God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.”

²² “While this doctrine [of righteousness by faith]... is critical to Paul's argument in Romans, it is not the overarching theme. For this theme, we need to look at the word that heads these two verses: *gospel*.” Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 50.

If you turn quickly to **Romans 3:5**, you'll find an **example** of Paul using the phrase in that sense—

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say?

2. What God does—God's activity of saving sinful people.

*"It is God's intervention to set right what has gone wrong with his creation."*²³

While there isn't a clear example of this in Paul's letter, many argue that it is the **Old Testament background** against which Paul writes Romans.

For example, in **Isaiah 51:5** we read—

My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples...

The parallel between Yahweh's righteousness and salvation shows a connection between the two terms in Isaiah.

Paul is **undoubtedly influenced by Isaiah** to a great degree, even if he doesn't explicitly articulate this sense of the righteousness of God.

3. What God gives—God's gift of a righteous status to sinful people.

This idea is based on the **metaphor of a court of law** and refers to righteousness **in a judicial sense**.

In other words, the righteousness of God is His gift of **legally declaring people to be righteous before Him**—it is a new legal standing before God.

²³ Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 52.

If you are still in **Romans 3**, look at **verses 21–22** for an example of where Paul **uses the phrase in this sense**—

²¹ **But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,**

²² **even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;**

Now, each time Paul uses the phrase we need to **examine it in its own context** in order to determine what he intends to communicate.

In **Romans 1:17**, Paul is clearly using “**the righteousness of God**” in the sense of **what God gives** because he **connects it with faith**.

So as he gives us the **second reason** for his enthusiasm for the gospel, he speaks of **the righteousness of God in justification**.

Justification is **God’s declaration of sinners to be in the right before Him by faith in Christ**.

Or as **MacArthur and Mayhue** put it, “*In justification, God legally declares that we are no longer deemed guilty under the divine law but are forgiven and counted righteous in God’s sight.*”²⁴

As we said earlier, the **heart of the gospel** is God’s justifying of unrighteous individuals through faith in Christ.

When you consider that God's justification of unrighteous people **required the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross**,

²⁴ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 609.

you can understand that the gospel is the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived.

Paul was so enthusiastic about the gospel because he understood the glory, the magnificence, of **all that God did in Christ in order to accomplish** His work of salvation for His people.

God justifies His people, He gives them the righteousness of God, **while still maintaining the righteousness** of who He is in His character/ perfection.

That's what Paul means in **Romans 3:25-26**—

²⁵ **God displayed publicly [Christ] as a propitiation in His blood through faith, for a demonstration of His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;**

²⁶ **for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

As **John Stott** wrote so well, the gospel reveals,
“*God’s righteous way of ‘righteoussing’ the unrighteous.*”

In other words, God both demonstrates His righteousness and gives His righteousness to us.

Now, as Paul says, the gospel “**reveals**” God’s saving work of **justifying His people by faith in Christ alone**.

It is certainly true that the gospel fully reveals God's plan, as Paul writes in **Ephesians 3:4–5** of “**the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.**”

In **Romans 1:17**, however, Paul seems to mean more than that.

He's using “**reveal**” in an **active sense** to describe God’s work.

The gospel reveals God’s plan of salvation as something that people can **not naturally know or find out for themselves**.

Unless God makes it known, no one will never discover it.

As **John Murray** comments—

*“[Paul] means that it was to be revealed in action and operation; the righteousness of God was to be made manifest with saving effect.”*²⁵

To put it in easier terms, the “**righteousness of God**” is **unleashed through the proclamation** of the gospel.²⁶

As Paul continues in **verse 17**, He says that, “**the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith...**”

²⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 29.

²⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 66.

This phrase, “**from faith to faith**” has **puzzled many commentators**, but while Paul's precise meaning is uncertain, the **point he is making is very clear**.

Paul means something like **the source and the goal are both faith**, or the **starting point and end are faith**.²⁷

However you understand the phrase in detail, the meaning is simple and clear.²⁸

Paul is highlighting the **centrality and exclusivity of faith**.²⁹

In other words, God's plan of saving His people by **righteously declaring unrighteousness people righteous** is **revealed by faith in its entirety**.

Or as many have put it, “**by faith from start to finish**.”³⁰

As the Reformers came to express it, Paul is articulating **justification by faith alone**.

Paul was enthusiastic about the gospel, because it revealed God's plan of a salvation by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone**.

Now, with that said, we do need to clarify what Paul means by “**faith**.”

²⁷ Cf. John D Harvey, *Romans*, ed. Andreas J Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (B&H, 2017), 30.

²⁸ “The best meaning is the least meaning.” Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 151–156.

“Silva rightly observes that in ambiguous phrases the interpretation that adds the least to the meaning of the passage should be preferred.” Schreiner, *Romans*, 78.

²⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 79.

³⁰ Porter, *Romans*, 21.

We said earlier that **faith is belief and personal trust** in Christ as **prompted by God's grace**.

But as Paul will later clarify in his letter, faith is also **contrasted** with one's own attempts to **earn or merit God's favour**.

Look briefly at **Romans 4:5**—

But to the one who does not work, but believes upon Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

Faith here is clearly the **opposite of trying to work for God's favour** in **general**, and His saving work of justification **specifically**.

As **Wayne Grudem** observes—

*“A true view of justification is the dividing line between the biblical gospel of salvation by faith alone and all false gospels of salvation based on good works.”*³¹

MacArthur makes the same point as he says—

*“In every age of human history, religion has answered that we can get to heaven by being good people. The various religious systems of the world concoct lists of rituals and ceremonies that must be performed to achieve a measure of righteousness that might avail in the courtroom of God.”*³²

This is Paul's **second reason** for viewing the gospel as the greatest message ever proclaimed.

³¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 884.

³² MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 609.

It announces the **greatest plan of salvation ever conceived**—one of God's sovereign, gracious saving work that reveals His plan of **righteously 'righteousing' unrighteous people through faith alone**.

Paul loved the gospel because of the **heart of the gospel is God's work of justification by faith alone**.

Now, Paul ends **verse 17** by quoting **Habakkuk 2:4**—
...as it is written, "But the righteous will live by faith."

Paul quoted **Habakkuk 2:4** to support the idea that **faith is at the heart of the gospel**.³³

In doing so, he was **literally applying** the theological point that Habakkuk had made.

As we compare Paul's quotation with the original, we do notice, however, that while **Paul respects the authorial intent** of Habakkuk, he does **change the word order to place greater emphasis** on righteousness by faith—that is, justification by faith.

³³ Michael J. Vlach, *The Old in the New: Understanding How the New Testament Authors Quoted the Old Testament* (Woodlands, TX; Sun Valley, CA: Kress Biblical Resources; Master's Seminary Press, 2021), 108.

One commentator clarifies—

“When Paul takes up Habakkuk’s words and sees in them the foundation truth of the gospel....

The terms of Habakkuk’s oracle are sufficiently general to make room for Paul’s application of them—an application which, far from doing violence to the prophet’s intention, expresses the abiding validity of his message.”³⁴

One final point to take note of is that for Paul ‘**life**,’ especially eternal life, and ‘**salvation**’ were **practically synonymous**.

So when Paul quotes Habakkuk to say that the one who is righteous by faith will live, he is **bringing his point full circle** back to **verse 16** and salvation to everyone who believes.

³⁴ Bruce, *Romans*, 86.

CONCLUSION

So as we conclude, **Romans 1:16–17** introduces the **thesis of Paul's letter**.

They sum up **Paul's "big idea" in Romans**.

They also demonstrate **Paul's love for the gospel**.

Paul was enthusiastic for the gospel because it is the greatest message ever proclaimed.

There are **two reasons** that Paul viewed it that way.

Paul was enthusiastic for the gospel, **firstly**, because it is the power of God in salvation and, **secondly**, because it is the righteousness of God in justification.

Or to put it simply, Paul loved the gospel because of **the power of God** and **the righteousness of God**.

Those are two reasons why you should love the gospel too.

When you love the gospel like Paul, you'll rejoice in the power of God by which He is saving you through faith alone—the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived.

When you love the gospel by Paul, you'll also view it as your highest honour and privilege to proclaim the gospel in evangelism.

You'll be enthusiastic to see God's power work in others too.

BENEDICTION

*Now may God be your exceeding joy,
Christ your only hope,
the Holy Spirit your unfailing comforter
in all your worship,
in all your work,
in all your troubles
until Jesus comes.
Amen.³⁵*

³⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 54.

1:8
b
c
d
1:9
b
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1:10
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1:11
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1:12
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1:13
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1:14
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1:15
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1:16
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1:17
b

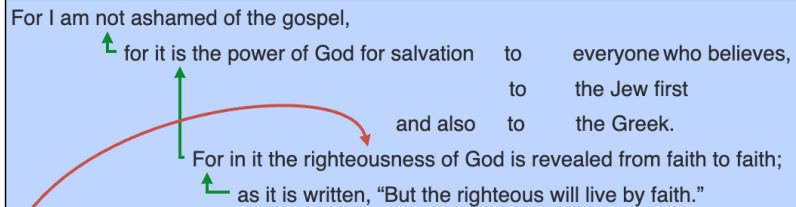
First, I thank my God
 through Jesus Christ
 for you all,
 because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.
 For God, [...] is my witness
 whom I serve
 in my spirit
 in the gospel of His Son,
 as to how without ceasing
 I make mention of you,
 always in my prayers
 earnestly asking,
 if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.
 For I long to see you
 so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you,
 that you may be strengthened;
 that is, to be mutually encouraged,
 while among you,
 by each other's faith,
 both yours and mine.
 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,
 that often I have planned to come to you
 (and have been prevented so far)
 so that I may have some fruit among you also,
 even as among the rest of the Gentiles.
 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,
 both to the wise and to the foolish.
 In this way, for my part,
 I am eager to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.
 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.
 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;
 as it is written, "But the righteous will live by faith."

Romans 1:16–17 LSB

1:16

b
o
d

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.
For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;
as it is written, "But the righteous will live by faith."



1:17

b

1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed [...]

| Reason for 15

| Reason for 16a

| Restates 16b

| Reason for 16b–d

| Basis of 17a

| Reason we need 17a