

July 11
Lesson 6 (NIV)

POWER OF THE GOSPEL

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 71:1-6, 17-24

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 1

ROMANS 1:8-17

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

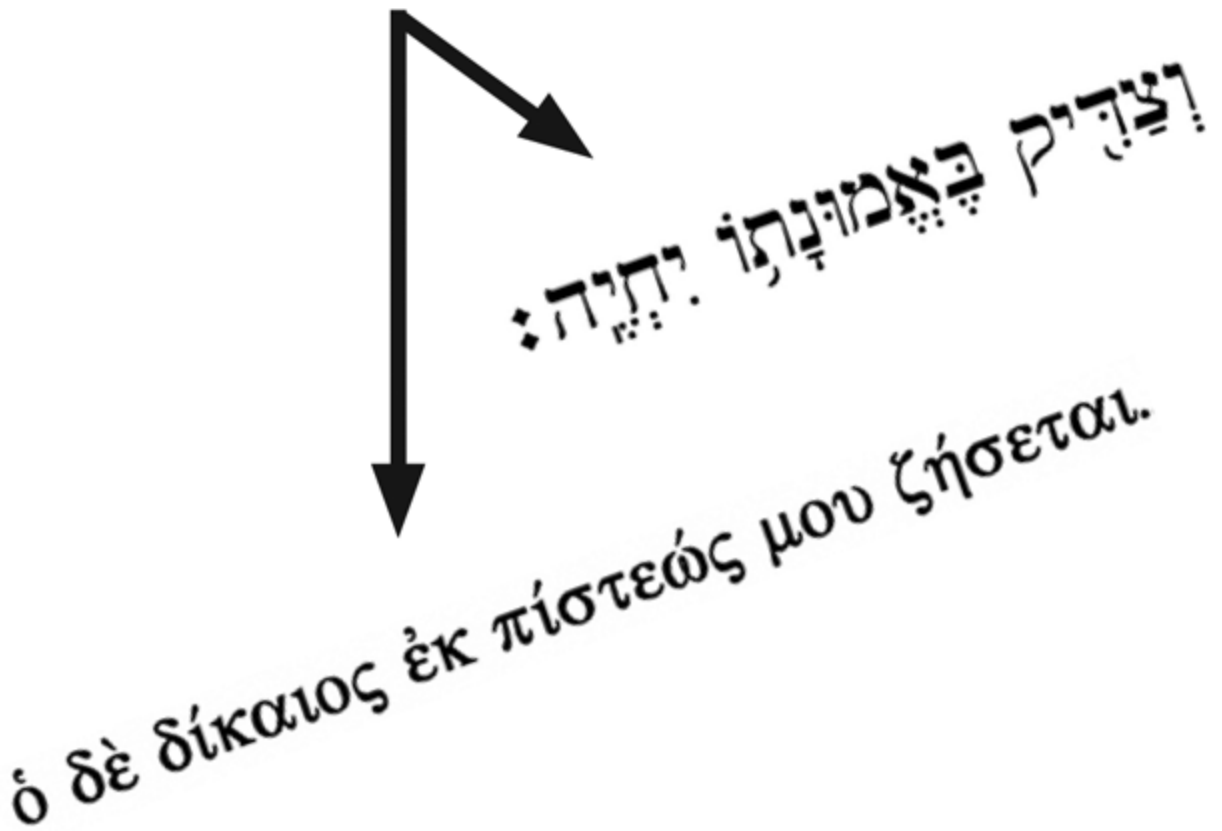


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KEY VERSE

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. —Romans 1:16

CONFIDENT HOPE

Unit 2: Faith and Salvation

LESSONS 6–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the groups to which Paul acknowledged his debt obligation.
2. Give one example each of being ashamed and being unashamed of the gospel.
3. Create two approaches for sharing the gospel: one for people having some gospel

knowledge already and the other for those with much less or no such knowledge.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. “Where the Money Is”
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Power of Witness (Romans 1:8–10)
 - A. Of a Church (v. 8)
 - B. Of an Individual (vv. 9–10)
 - Responding to His Call*
- II. Power of Preaching (Romans 1:11–15)
 - A. Spiritual Insight and Fruit (vv. 11–13)
 - B. Spiritual Debts and Readiness (vv. 14–15)
- III. Power of Faith (Romans 1:16–17)
 - A. Overcoming Shame (v. 16)
 - The Power of the Gospel*
 - B. Revealing Righteousness (v. 17)

Conclusion

- A. Come to the Cross
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Abraham	<i>Ay-bruh-ham.</i>
Antioch	<i>An-tee-ock.</i>
Claudius	<i>Claw-dee-us.</i>
Corinth	<i>Kor-inth.</i>
Ephesus	<i>Ef-uh-sus.</i>
Habakkuk	<i>Huh-back-kuk.</i>
Pentecost	<i>Pent-ih-kost.</i>
Philippi	<i>Fih-lip-pie or Fil-ih-pie.</i>

Introduction

A. “Where the Money Is”

Willie Sutton (1901–1980)—also known as The Actor and Slick Willie—was infamous as a thief. He would arrive at his target, usually a bank or store, just before they opened. On at least one occasion, he had the security guard admit employees as they arrived, then tied them up in an office to prevent any trouble. His disguises included dressing as a telegraph messenger, a policeman, and a maintenance man. Even in the midst of his crimes, Sutton was noted as being quite polite, even gentlemanly.

Sutton was caught several times, and he escaped prison on more than one occasion. After one escape, a tailor’s son recognized Sutton. The fugitive had not come to commit robbery but instead to get a suit tailored! When asked why he robbed banks, Sutton replied, “That’s where the money is.” What other explanation could a person possibly need? Sutton wanted money, banks had money, so logically he went to banks to relieve them of their funds.

Paul was no criminal, but his answer to a certain question might have been similar to Sutton’s. Why did Paul go to the cities to preach the gospel? Because that’s where the people were!

B. Lesson Context

Cities seemed to hold a special attraction for Paul in a strategic way. Three of his key ministries were in Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus—all among the 10 largest cities of the empire. But Paul had a burning desire to visit the greatest city of them all, Rome, the capital of the empire and center of the world in those days.

The saying “All roads lead to Rome” was more than proverbial for Paul. The city was unparalleled in the ancient world. After Rome’s decline in late antiquity, Europe would not see anything to rival it until London in the nineteenth century. Paul was convinced that God was calling him to go to Rome.

Paul, formerly Saul the persecutor of Christians, wrote the letter to the Romans in advance of his trip there. A church was growing in Rome, a church made up of individuals who were likely present in Jerusalem on Pentecost ([Acts 2:10](#)) and of believers they converted.

Some of those whom Paul had led to Christ seemed to have traveled to Rome ahead of him for one reason or another. That is clear from the list of personal greetings that Paul includes at the end of the letter, in [chapter 16](#). It was important to Paul that they grow in the right direction. They needed a strong doctrinal base, and they needed some practical spiritual counsel. In this letter they received both.

Paul wrote the book of Romans in about AD 58, during his third missionary journey. This timing is supported by [Acts 20:2–3](#), which states that Paul spent three months in Greece. This in turn supports the conclusion that Paul wrote from the Greek city of Corinth, home of a

beloved church he had founded and ministered to for 18 months a few years earlier. Staying put in this Greek city among people he knew and loved would have allowed Paul the time to craft such a carefully, masterfully written letter.

The contents of Romans reflect Paul's experience in presenting a gospel that is both doctrinal and relational in matters faced by growing Christians. Paul was in the prime years of his ministry, being able to present the fruit of his personal familiarity with bringing people to Christ and providing an atmosphere for their growth. He was prepared to send a letter that addressed many important issues, countered spiritual errors, and emphasized core truths of the Christian faith.

I. Power of Witness

(ROMANS 1:8–10)

A. Of a Church (v. 8)

8. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

Having introduced himself and laid out the basics of his gospel (Romans 1:1–7), Paul encouraged the Roman Christians by revealing the content of his prayers to God regarding them. Expressing gratitude and thankfulness is characteristic of his letters.

What Do You Think?

How can you improve the ratio of “thanking for” to “asking for” in your prayer life?

Digging Deeper

Why is it important to do so?

Paul's observation that reports of the faithfulness of this church were being *reported all over the world* may partly result from the painful expulsion they had faced. Turmoil in Rome had prompted Emperor Claudius (reigned AD 41–54) to expel from the city all those of Jewish background in about AD 49 (Acts 18:1–2). The turmoil was likely a conflict between Jews who had converted to Christianity and those who had not. The Romans didn't make a distinction between the two at the time, so all those of Jewish background were told to leave town.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, Claudius had died, and Jews had returned to Rome. Within the Christian community, this caused reconsideration of the relationships between Jews, Gentiles, and God.

B. Of an Individual (vv. 9–10)

9–10. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Worldwide Christianity would be blessed by a strong, faithful congregation in the great city of Rome. Its location at the transportation hub of the empire would allow the church’s witness to spread in all directions. For this and for his anticipated trip, Paul prayed sincerely. He valued the advance of *the gospel of God’s Son* as his primary objective. His budding relationship with the Christians in Rome was part of his grand vision for bringing the message of salvation to all people of the world.

Although Paul could be bold, even brash, in his claims and plans, we see his humility on display here. His great desire to go to Rome was tempered by his intent to submit to *God’s will*. Our greatest plans, no matter how noble, depend on God’s blessing and assistance if they are to be successful.

The route from Corinth to Rome was regularly traveled, taking only a few weeks. But Paul decided to return to Jerusalem before visiting Rome (see [Acts 19:21](#)). This delayed his trip to Rome by a year or more. But spiritual guidance couldn’t wait, thus the need for this letter to serve that church in the interim.

RESPONDING TO HIS CALL

I met a minister who planted a church in my city last year. Before then, he had been ministering in his father’s church, which was across the country. While there, he had mentored a young man from my city. That young man asked the minister to pray for his family.

The minister did pray and eventually had a phone conversation with the family. During the call, the minister felt a burden for the family and the people of my city. Soon, he told his wife that he sensed a call to move their family across the country to start a church. At the time, he didn’t even know the location of my city on a map! Even though it seemed like a big step of faith, the minister heeded God’s call.

When God burdens your heart for reaching people, responding to the call is worth the sacrifice. Consider whom God may have been calling you to reach. In what ways have you been resisting? How will you respond this week?

—L. H.-P.

II. Power of Preaching

([ROMANS 1:11–15](#))

A. Spiritual Insight and Fruit (vv. [11–13](#))

11. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—

Paul shares some reasons why he desired to visit the church in Rome. We should not understand his stated desire to *impart to them some spiritual gift* to refer to something specific since he did not yet know their specific needs. What he probably had in mind was something like “spiritual insight” for guiding the church in providing what the Roman church lacked—something that could be provided only by Paul. Nor should we hear Paul implying that the Roman church was on shaky ground; he was not the one who founded that church, and he had only secondhand knowledge of its situation. More likely what we are seeing here is Paul’s understanding of the value of face-to-face fellowship, something that cannot be equaled by letters or messengers.

Paul’s writing to these brothers and sisters in Christ was a step toward a long time of teaching and dialogue (see [Acts 28:16–31](#)). The goal of this education was to be the establishment of the Roman church in sound Christian teaching (doctrine) and practice.

12. that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.

One of the outstanding aspects of being a Christian, something difficult to explain to nonbelievers, is the comfort and joy we find as we share our “precious” faith with one another ([2 Peter 1:1](#)). We can share the victories we have over sin and death ([Romans 8:1–2](#)). We can give honor to God, who promises never to allow us to be separated from his love ([8:35–39](#)). We can remind ourselves that all things are working for good according to God’s purposes ([8:28](#)). We can participate in corporate prayers enlivened by the Holy Spirit we share ([8:26–27](#)). We can encourage each other with stories of our life transformations, our resistance to being conformed to the sinful influences of the world ([12:1–2](#)).

These themes were a foretaste of the joyous time Paul anticipated when he finally joined the Romans for fellowship.

13. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

Paul preached and wrote expectantly, anticipating that God would use his words as seed to bring about *a harvest* (compare [1 Corinthians 3:6–7](#)). Paul’s writing suggests that this growth would be seen at least in part in spiritual virtues (see [Galatians 5:22–23](#)). He also wanted to preach among the people of Rome because he believed it would result in conversions and changed lives. This was not unfounded fantasy, because Paul had already experienced much fruit during his ministries in Corinth ([Acts 18](#)), Philippi ([16:12–15, 25–34, 40](#)), and other Gentile cities. As he wrote later, people cannot hear and believe unless there is a preacher ([Romans 10:14](#); see lesson 9).

Paul had a strong sense of God’s direction of his ministry. Though Paul had long *planned* to

visit Rome, he had been hindered in each instance. Various circumstances and even spiritual directions changed Paul's plans (see [Acts 16:6](#)). And at the time of the writing of Romans, his choice to go to Jerusalem rather than Rome was driven by a deep-seated conviction that no one around him shared ([Acts 21:12–14](#)). Paul explained later in the letter that part of what *prevented* him was his great burden to preach the gospel among unevangelized *Gentiles* ([Romans 15:17–22](#)). Paul's travels had been to serve Christ, not simply to find personal fulfillment.

What Do You Think?

Which problem do you most need to address: being exasperated that God's timing isn't fast enough or that it's moving too fast?

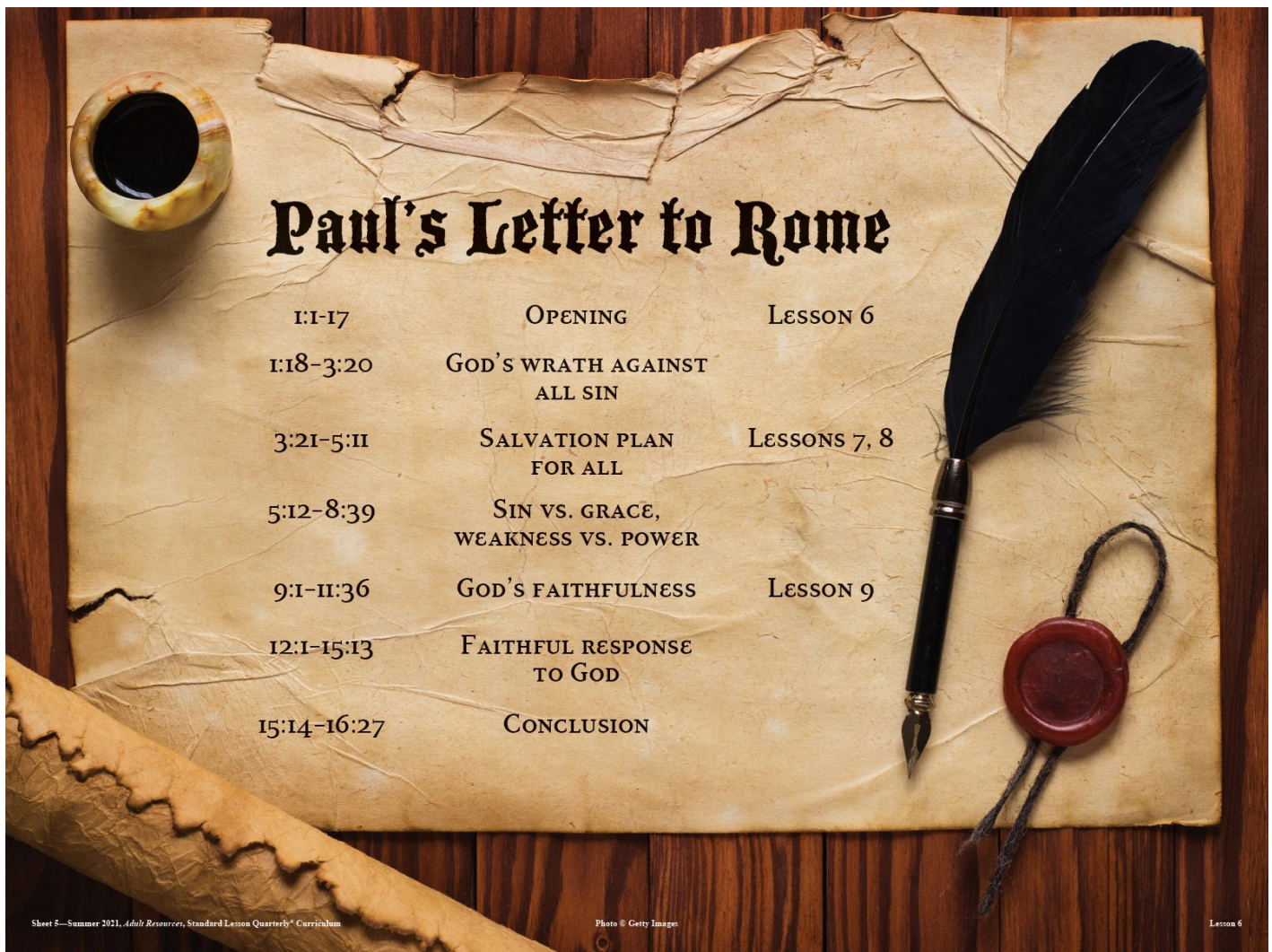
Digging Deeper

What Bible examples can you offer for each?

B. Spiritual Debts and Readiness (vv. 14–15)

14a. I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks,

Paul described his relationship with unevangelized people he had never met in terms of owing a debt to them. His spiritual duty could only be discharged by preaching the gospel to the unsaved. This concept was central to his passion for the Gentile mission.



Visual for Lesson 6. Keep this visual posted during lessons 6–9 so learners can maintain a bird's-eye perspective on the book of Romans.

Gentiles could be subdivided as two groups of people, based on a Greek understanding of the world. *Greeks* themselves were Gentile unbelievers in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. These were assumed to be the most civilized and most sophisticated citizens in the Roman Empire.

The word *non-Greeks* translates a word that sounds like our word *barbarians* when pronounced. These were people who lived beyond the regions of Greek influence, who spoke languages other than Greek (compare and contrast [Acts 2:5–11](#)). In Paul's day, Greeks had a strong sense of cultural superiority based on their philosophical traditions and refined language. To them, languages other than Greek sounded like babbling nonsense, “bar-bar-bar,” qualifying such speakers as “barbarians.” It's been said that after the Romans conquered the Greeks militarily, the Greeks turned around and conquered the Romans culturally. The Romans later adopted the category of barbarian to refer to all people who did not have Greek or Roman heritage.

14b. both to the wise and the foolish.

Paul's inclusiveness in preaching indicates that knowledge or education levels are not a criterion for Paul's target audiences (see [1 Corinthians 1:26](#)). Some students propose that Paul used parallelism to mean that the Greeks were *the wise* while the barbarians were *the foolish*. This would fit the Greek and Roman view of their heritage contrasted with that of other people groups.

15. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

At first glance, this verse may seem strange. Why plan to *preach the gospel* to the recipients of this letter, who are already Christians? We should realize that preaching the gospel involves more than initial evangelizing. This is clear in the five dozen or so times Paul used the phrase "the gospel" in his letters.

III. Power of Faith

([ROMANS 1:16–17](#))

A. Overcoming Shame (v. 16)

16a. For I am not ashamed of the gospel,

Elsewhere, Paul noted that the message of the cross was a "stumbling block to Jews" ([1 Corinthians 1:23](#)). The core elements of Paul's preaching would not avoid the historical truth that Jesus had been executed like the worst of criminals ([2:2](#)). Jesus' death was easily dismissed by critics as neither heroic nor in obedience to God's will, but as only shameful.

Of course, the shame of the cross was real ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). But the gospel reveals that shame was not the full story of Jesus' execution (see [Philippians 2:5–11](#)). Therefore Paul was *not ashamed* of the cross. Rather, he gloried in it ([Galatians 6:14](#)).

16b. because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Not only does the gospel possess the power to save *everyone who believes*, it also had the power to break down the walls separating Jews and Gentiles—a point discussed further by Paul in Ephesians. There he explicitly welcomed the uncircumcised who had previously been legally restricted from full participation in the covenant with Israel (see [Ephesians 2:11–22](#)).

It is difficult to determine whether the church in Rome consisted mostly of Jewish-Christians or Gentile-Christians. Clearly, both were present ([Romans 2:17; 11:13](#)). Some believers of Jewish background in the church in Rome were likely present in Jerusalem on Pentecost and heard the gospel from Peter. Those Jews were among the *first* to hear the good news. But Gentiles also needed to know this *power of God that brings salvation*. As we noted in previous lessons of this quarter, the word *salvation* can take a broad range of meanings in the New Tes-

tament, depending on context. But not in Paul’s writings; he uses that word only in a spiritual sense (examples: [Romans 10:1](#), [10](#); [11:11](#); [13:11](#); [2 Corinthians 1:6](#); [6:2](#); [7:10](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways, if at all, does [Romans 1:16](#) help you act according to spiritual priorities?

Digging Deeper

What do you see those priorities being?

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

We had two family members die within the same week: an aunt and uncle who had been married for more than 60 years. It was devastating to lose them, even though the couple had lived long, fulfilling lives. In accordance with her aunt’s wishes, my wife was asked to deliver a eulogy at the funeral. She delivered a powerful message of hope from [John 14](#). The family needed to be reminded of the truth that through Christ’s death and resurrection Christians have the assurance of eternal union with God.

One family member came to my wife after the service to express how her eulogy had affected him. He had been feeling such a heaviness during the service that it was difficult for him to breathe. But as he had listened, he experienced an easing of his heavy heart. He could breathe normally again as the service concluded.

The gospel has the power to do many things, including breaking the sting of death. How will you allow the gospel’s “power ... that brings salvation” help you overcome the next tragedy that comes your way?

—L. H.-P.

B. Revealing Righteousness (v. 17)

17. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

The gospel is the most crucial message ever because there *the righteousness of God is revealed*. The gospel tells sinful people how to become right with God. That is something that we can never earn or achieve through our own efforts ([Isaiah 64:6](#)). Our only hope is to accept by faith the gift of God’s righteousness as provided by him through the death of Jesus. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)).

Paul concluded this summary of his gospel message by quoting a key Old Testament verse for understanding the nature of faith: [Habakkuk 2:4](#). In the original setting of this verse,

Habakkuk complained to the Lord about the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, expecting action from God (1:12–2:1). God’s final word was that his people must remain faithful, trusting him for the outcome that vindicates righteousness and justice (2:2–19). Our job is not to try to compel God to act; rather, it is to place our faith in God to do the right thing in his timing.

Christ’s death on the cross was the right thing at the right time (Galatians 4:4–5). It’s what allows people to become justified, to be treated as faultless before God’s throne. The price for our sins has been paid. Paul presents this as a revealing of the nature of God, that he both demands *righteousness* from us and makes this possible despite our sin and weakness. Later Paul will say this allows God to remain completely holy and righteous himself while working to make sinful humanity righteous too. God is both “just and the one who justifies” those who trust him (Romans 3:26).

The exact meaning of the phrase *by faith from first to last* has been debated. But the likely intent of Paul is to show that this whole faith agenda is not a new invention by Christians. God’s people have always built a successful relationship with him on faith. Paul later gave the example of Abraham, whose faith was “credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3, 22; see lesson 7, Genesis 15:6). Trusting in God is not new, but now we are to include faith in Jesus—that his death has the effect of saving us from our sins. It is faith *then*, faith *now*, and faith *going forward*.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain to someone the difference between a blind faith and the kind of faith Paul talks about?

Digging Deeper

How would that explanation differ to a believer and an unbeliever, if at all? Why?

Conclusion

A. Come to the Cross

The most recognized Christian symbol is the cross. We see it on churches, as jewelry, in logos, in massive monuments, and in cemeteries. For many, the cross is most associated with the latter as it marks a grave of a loved one.

As Christians, we affirm that Jesus’ cross is about death. But the cross is also about life, for Jesus’ death gives us the possibility of being forgiven of our sins, escaping the penalty of death, and embracing eternal life as a gift. To do this, we must come to the cross in faith. We must not be ashamed. We must come believing that the cross represents the great love of

God. We must come convinced that faith in Christ has the power to save us. It is there that our burden of sin was lifted and our spiritual blindness will become the sight of faith.

What Do You Think?

Which concept in today's text requires more "live it out" on your part? Why?

Digging Deeper

How do you plan to make that happen?

B. Prayer

Lord God, may we approach your throne with faith, unashamed of our love and trust for your Son, Jesus Christ. May we give all that we have to serve you and to bring the gospel message to those who have not heard. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The gospel is powerful for all who believe.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Ask class members to share a memory of the most important trip they ever took. Note that the question is not about their most enjoyable or most interesting trip, although those descriptions may also apply. Conduct this exercise by either (1) displaying a world map and asking volunteers to walk to it and tell about their trip, (2) giving each learner a handout of a map (you prepare) as they pair off to locate and discuss their trips, or (3) simply posing the question and ask volunteers to share. (*Caution:* Beware of the danger of letting this drag out too long.)

Make a transition to Bible study by saying, "Some trips simply *must* be taken, regardless of (or because of) circumstances. The same was true in Paul's day—let's see why."

Into the Word

Announce a consideration of the context of the book of Romans. Put in a basket the following questions printed on four slips of paper (you prepare in advance), one question per slip:

- 1—Who was Paul?
- 2—Why was Rome important?
- 3—When was the book of Romans written?
- 4—What problems does Paul address in Romans?

Have four volunteers draw out one slip each to read aloud in sequence as numbered. Allow the volunteer the first chance to answer the question drawn. Follow that by inviting all class members to add to the response. Fill in gaps with information in the Lesson Context of today's lesson.

Have two participants alternate in reading aloud the 10 verses of today's lesson text, [Romans 1:8–17](#). Divide your class into groups of no more than six each. To half the groups, distribute a handout (you prepare) on which is printed these three phrases as headers of three columns:

Reference / Why the Desire / What to Accomplish

Include instructions to complete the chart by examining today's lesson text. Have this printed at the bottom of the handout for completion:

One statement to describe the mission Paul wanted to have among the Romans is _____

Concurrently, distribute to the other groups handouts (you prepare) featuring these three phrases to be completed:

- 1—Why the gospel is important:
- 2—What the gospel achieves:
- 3—What the gospel reveals:

Option. Modify the above groupings by creating an additional, third grouping of learners. Distribute to this/these group(s) copies of the “Qualifications, Please!” exercise from the activity page to be completed and reported as indicated. Reconvene groups for whole-class sharing.

Into Life

Ask students to gather again in their groups as you distribute the following discussion prompts on handouts (you prepare):

- 1—The power of the gospel has affected me by ...

2—Three ways I can better “live by faith” are ...

3—My biggest challenge in sharing the gospel is ...

After several minutes, reconvene for whole-class discussion. Use responses to the third discussion prompt to challenge learners to suggest two approaches for sharing the gospel: one for people having some gospel knowledge already and the other for those with much less or no such knowledge. Close with prayers that are suggested by responses to the three discussion prompts: thanks to God for life changes, strength from God for every class member to live by faith this week, help from God to face the challenges shared.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Paul’s Mission to Rome” crossword on the activity page as a take-home.