

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

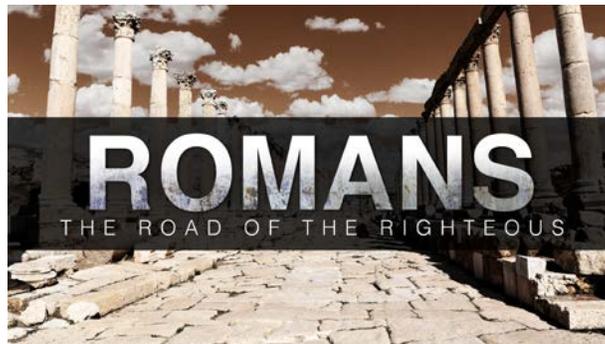
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 1:16-17

Written By

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Speaking with a long-time Jewish friend this week, she commented on how she really didn't know theologically why she, along with her family, observed the Jewish religious feasts like Yom Kippur. She added, "If you asked anyone in my family why we did this, she said that two out of ten of them would have absolutely no idea. It's just what we do as Jews." Interesting.

She also commented on how she had no clue as to whether God existed or not, but she's open to discussing the so-called proofs, if any existed. I replied, "That is interesting you would say that because in two weeks I'll be giving a week-end seminar titled *Proofs of the Presence*.' The seminar's goal is to give attendees four of the major arguments favoring the existence of a personal creator, God. Would you be interested in seeing my Power Point notes?" "Sure," she responded, "that would be great."

Believe me, I'm excited to send these notes to her because if she can first wrap her mind around the strong evidences for the existence of living God, then the logical progression will go something like this:

- If there is a God, then He could speak.
- The Bible (your Torah and Prophets) claim to be His revelatory book.
- How would you know this is His inspired, holy books beyond all so-called inspired, holy books?
- Precise prophecy validates that this is God's book. Further, these spectacular

prophecies also verify that Jesus was and is none other than the promised Messiah and Savior of mankind.

This last point is where I, as a Christian, head ultimately because it is all about the good news from God to sinners. And, as Paul, a converted Jew discovered, that good news, that gospel is something you can't keep to yourself. On the contrary, its message and meaning should motivate you to be a witness, even in a nice restaurant with a great friend who doesn't know the Messiah.

Just in case you desire to understand why this gospel should burn with your bosom, Paul gives us multiple answers in Romans 1:6-17.

What Are The Reasons To Be Motivated To Share The Gospel? (Romans 1:16-17)

Three causal clauses denoted by the use of "for" (γάρ) give us the reasons.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith" (Romans 1).

¹⁶ Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι. ¹⁷ δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. (Romans 1).

Reason #1: The Gospel Is Pre-eminent (Romans 1:16a)

There is no gospel like it. It is THE gospel from God and there is no other. Second,

Reason #2: The Gospel Is Powerful (Romans 1:16b)

Now power on earth matches God's gospel because it has the ability to take a spiritually dead sinner and, at the moment of faith, grant them eternal life.

With verses 17, like a skilled attorney, Paul gives us the third reason we should be highly motivated to share the gospel of God.

Reason #3: The Gospel Is Purifying (Romans 1:17)

Paul says this much in verse 17:

¹⁷ For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

These profound words not only give us the key to the book of Romans, but they remind us of the two paths the creator has set before us. Regarding this Jesus taught most definitively:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, if you are those that find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

Spiritual life, as we know it, is reduced to two distinct paths: one is heaven-bound, the other is hell-bound. There are no other paths, although men would like to think there is. No, there are just these two. The path of life is accessed by your belief in the gospel about Jesus Christ, i.e., His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15), while the path of death is accessed by your birth into the sinful line of Adam, followed by a rejection of the general and special revelation of God concerning His existence and good news for sinners.

Another thing you need to know about these two paths is this: the path of life is always based on faith, while the path of death leads people to believe, although wrongly so, that they can gain access to the path of life by means of faith *plus* their good works (be what they may). Nothing could be further from the truth but this is what death walkers think so they can have Go on their terms. Take, for instance, what the book of *Ether* chapter 9, verse 26 of the book of Mormon has to say about how to make sure you are on the right path:

Wherefore, I Moroni, commanded to write these things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come into the fountain of all righteousness and be saved.

Here's another:

¹⁸ But, behold, the righteous, the Saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they would've endured crosses of the world, and despise the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever (2 Nephi, chapter 9, verse 18).

Just in case you might think this is an unfair appraisal of the Mormon perspective on how one finds salvation, consider other verses from their supposedly divine revelation:

Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven; And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 1, verse 32).

²¹ And now I command you, my servant Joseph, to repent and walk more uprightly before me, and to yield to the persuasions of men no more; ²² And that should be firm in keeping the Commandments wherewith I commanded you; and if you do this, behold I grant unto you eternal life, even if you should be slain (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 5, verses 21-22).

⁶ Seek to bring forth and establish my Zion. Keep my commandments and all things. And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 14, verse 7).

I will stop there because I think you get the point. All false religions have several tell-tale signs: 1. They diminish the Word of God, 2. They diminish the person and work of Jesus Christ, 3. They have a new prophet or prophets with new prophetic information, and 4. They, without exception diminish salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9) by adding works to the concept of salvation.

Marked this well. False religions are known by stressing you must have faith in God coupled with perpetual moral/religious performance to secure righteousness and salvation. Such teaching is diametrically opposed to everything God has revealed to us in the Scriptures, especially in Romans. One of the sad outcomes of this type of teaching is it leaves the worshiper with no assurance of where they are headed in eternity because he never knows if he has done enough to please God until he sees Him face-to-face. It also serves to create an air of fear and superstition that you might not be doing enough to please God.

Paul, on the other hand, stands firm footed in Romans 1:17 and refutes this erroneous teaching by clearly demonstrating that the gospel which saves is based on your faith in the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. He demonstrates in this one concise verse the only way an absolutely wicked son of Adam can possess true holiness and righteousness is by means of faith in this gospel. How, then, is it possible for you to make sure you are on the right spiritual path? The loving apostle shows you here by discussing three facets of the righteousness which comes only by faith.

The Meaning of Righteousness (Rom. 1:17a). Paul uses the word “righteous” (δικαιοσύνη) twice in this first, and then it's repeated use throughout the rest of the book demonstrates it is a key doctrinal word (4:3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 22; 5:17, 21; 6:13, 16, 18, 19, 20; 8:10; 9:30-31; 10:5, 6, 10; 14:17). Since this word is important to the book and is significant in our understanding of how we can make sure we are prepared for eternity, we must take a look at its meaning. Lexically, in its base form it means “to conform to a norm,”¹ however, when applied to the Scriptures to emphasize surface.

One, it can emphasize practice. “Righteousness,” which is also the pivotal word in the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 33:19; Psa. 4:1; 51:19; Isa. 1:21; Jer. 23:6; Ezek. 3:20), points to one who lives “rightly” in light of what God has revealed his holy conduct. The Pentateuch, the historical books, and the prophets in the Old Testament _ this meaning as they call the people of God to the kind of

¹Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1950), 202.

living God finds acceptable. Paul's use of "righteousness" in 1 Timothy 6:11 reflects this Old Testament usage:

But flee from these things, you men of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

Obviously, righteousness here speaks of one's moral performance. Contextually, intimate the chapter 6 Paul is saying that if Timothy learns to flee the love of money and worldly desires he will be classified as a righteous man. But there's more to the meaning in this.

Two, it emphasizes position. By this I mean the term speaks of a person standing before God apart from their moral behavior. Various Hebrew and Greek dictionaries can help us at this juncture when they define the word:

- "To render just or innocent."²
- "Being acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous."³
- "To declare worthy, . . . to declare guiltless . . . to judge, declare, pronounce righteous and therefore acceptable."⁴
- "The act of clearing someone of transgression— 'to acquit, to set free, to remove guilt, acquittal.'⁵

Used in this fashion "righteousness" is something outside the sinner which is given to them by God, who is the essence of what it means to be righteous.⁶ The sinner does not work to secure this righteousness rather God gives it to them based on their faith in Jesus. Romans 4 beautifully illustrates this second usage of "righteousness." Speaking about how the repentant sinner gets saved, Paul says,

⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN

² *Hebrew-Greek Study Bible*, 23.

³ Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 196.

⁴ *New Thayers Greek-English Lexicon*, 150.

⁵ *Louw-Nida's Greek-English Lexicon*, 557.

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 80. It is essential to know that δικαιοσύνη is juridical: by his verdict God, the Judge in heaven, pronounces the believer righteous and by that pronouncement places the believer into the status of righteousness where he remains as long as he is ὁ πιστεύων. It is fatal to eliminate the forensic idea from δικαιοσύνη. This cannot be done linguistically, save by changing the sense; it cannot be done doctrinally, save by rejecting the central doctrine of all Scripture.⁶

COVERED. ⁸ “BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”

The emphasis here is upon being “declared righteous” based upon faith in Jesus. Other passages where the word righteous is used in this fashion appear throughout Romans (3:24, 28; 5:1, 9; 8:30, 33).

What does all this mean? When Paul says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:17), he is using the second meaning of the word. He is saying the gospel takes the unrighteous sinner and makes him a righteous person based on his faith in the person and work of Jesus. The sinner’s moral and religious works coupled with his faith are not even part of the redemptive equation.

Paul addresses this concept in Philippians chapter 3:

⁹ [That I] may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil. 3).

Paul says in our vernacular, “Say, I do not want my salvation to depend on my personal moral and spiritual performance. No way. That’s not good enough for God because he is perfect. I, rather, rely on righteousness which is obtained from God through my faith in Jesus.” Talk about the ultimate way to secure eternal spiritual purification!

The Master of the Righteousness (Rom. 1:17b). Who is the owner of this grand righteousness? Paul uses the genitive of possession with the name of God to underscore He, and He alone, is the possessor of this righteousness. He owns this righteousness. Many scriptures support this conclusion. Here are a few think about:

¹³⁷ Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments (Psalm 119:137).

⁴ The LORD is righteous; He has cut in two the cords of the wicked (Psalm 129).

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (1 John 2).

⁵ And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; (Rev. 16).

God is, in His person, the very essence of all that righteousness means. He is, in a word, morally perfect, and this dynamic character demands that anyone who desires to reside in His presence must be like Him lest they be consumed with His holy presence. The righteousness He gives you at the moment of faith is that which allows you to stand before Him without fear.

Although all illustrations break down at some point, think of God's righteousness in relation to a proximity suit. What are these? These are specially designed suits for those who



want to, for instance, descend into a fiery, lava-churning volcano. Believe it or not, they actually have websites for these types of suits (www.newtex.com is one of them). What has this got to do with God's righteousness?

Everything. When it is applied to your life at the moment of faith, it acts, in one way, as a protective suit before the presence of a holy God whose glory is likened unto a blazing, all-consuming inferno (Ex. 24:17; Deut. 5:25-26; Psa. 97:3; Heb. 12:29). With the suit of righteousness, which comes directly from the manufacturer (God), you can stand before Him without being vaporized. In fact, you can really stand there and enjoy a personal, loving, open, transparent relationship with Him. To think you have found how to secure righteousness apart from God by means of your own personal works is tantamount to standing before a red hot volcano without a God-approved proximity suit. Is that you? If so, I hope by the end of this study you will change your thinking by placing your faith in Jesus because He possesses all righteousness.

Man's problem is he possesses absolutely no righteousness and holiness. Not one drop. He is what theologians call "totally depraved." Dr. Charles Ryrie explains what this means better than most:

Depravity means that man fails the test of pleasing God. He denotes his unmeritoriousness in God's sight. This failure is total in that (a) it affects all aspects of man's being, and (b) it affects all people. Negatively, the concept of total depravity does not mean (a) every person has exhibited his depravity as thoroughly as he or she could; (b) that sinners do not have a conscience or a 'native induction' concerning God' (c) that sinners will indulge in every form of sin; or (d) that depraved people do not perform actions that are good in the sight of others and even the sight of God.

Positively, total depravity means (a) that corruption extends to every facet of man's nature and faculties; and (b) that there is nothing in anyone that can commend him to a righteous God.

Total depravity must always be measured against God's holiness. Relative goodness exists in people. They can do good works which are appreciated by

others. But nothing that anyone can do will gain salvation merit your favor in the sight of a holy God.⁷

Speaking about the depraved nature of man, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones as these profound thoughts:

Man's very nature is fallen. Man is wrong at the center of his being, and therefore everything is wrong. He cannot be improved, for, finally, nothing will suffice but a radical change, a new nature. Man loves the darkness and hates the light. What can be done for him? Can you change himself? Can he renew his nature? 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots'? ⁸

The answer is a resounding "No!" Because of man's sinful status standing is completely incapable of doing anything to make himself acceptable to God.

This is where the gospel, grounded upon the righteous character God, becomes so wonderful and important. The righteousness the sinner lacks because of his relationship with Adam is freely given to you by God based, as the last part of Romans 1, verse 17 says, on faith. In other words, God shares his righteousness with you, although you didn't deserve it. This is, my friend, what separates the true gospel from false gospels (Gal. 1). The true gospel is based on God's righteousness coupled with your faith. False Gospels are based on your righteous works linked with your faith in God, or whoever He may be to you. One saves while the other damns. One makes you spiritually pure, while the other leaves you spiritually dirty while also causing you to think you are clean. The question has to be asked in light of all of this: Do you have God's righteousness? Are you wearing His suit of righteousness?

As we close our analysis of the purifying power of God's righteousness, we encounter one more key concept in the last part of verse 17.

The Magnificence of Righteousness (Rom. 1:17c). It is magnificent because of its ability to purify a sin-stained soul. As Paul points out with this final lofty concluding clause, it is biblically proven fact in Old and New Testament times God's gospel has *always* been about His righteousness which is available to cleanse sinners who come to Him in humble, trusting faith. It has never been founded and/or grounded upon the moral/religious works of sinful man, no matter how well-intentioned, moral, and nice they were or are. Here's how Paul develops the motif:

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

This is the NASB translation of a somewhat complex Greek syntax. Righteousness, or holiness, does, in fact, originate in and with God (not with man), which is grammatically denoted with God

⁷Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 218-219.

⁸John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), 105.

(θεοῦ) being in the genitive case . . . representing “possession” (as stated). According to Paul, the fact that righteousness originates with God “is revealed.” The verb here is most interesting and instructive. It is *apokalupto* (ἀποκαλύπτω), and it sounds familiar because it is the word typically translated apocalyptic. What does it lexically mean? Friberg’s *Analytical Greek Lexicon* provides the word’s lexical nuances:

[Fri] **ἀποκαλύπτω** fut. ἀποκαλύψω; laor. ἀπεκάλυψα; laor. pass. ἀπεκαλύφθην; with a basic meaning *uncover, reveal*; figuratively in the NT; (1) generally *disclose, make known, reveal* (MT 10.26); (2) of divine revelation; (a) active *reveal, make known* (MT 11.25); (b) passive *be revealed, be shown* (RO 1.17, 18); (3) passive, of persons *appear, be revealed, be made (fully) known* (LU 17.30) **ἀποκαλύπτεται** VIPP--3S ἀποκαλύπτω.⁹

What is God revealing? What is He uncovering? He’s uncovering the fact that the gospel is based on His righteousness . . . end of story. The verb here, a present tense passive indicative supports this conclusion, too. The passive voice of the verb tells us the subject is being acted upon from an outside source. I take it the subject here is mankind. The present tense of verb informs us this revelatory action on God’s part is a *perpetual* reality. The NIV represents all of this grammatical data with this translation:

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. (Rom. 1:17).

Ostensibly, what does this all mean? Good question. It means that God loves us and provides constant proofs that access to Him is by means of faith in His gospel and not in man’s inferior moral and/or religious works.

How does God reveal His gospel? The sky is really the limit. For starters, you just heard about it in this sermon, so you are now accountable to what you’ve heard. He makes sure you hear about it as a child sitting in a vacation Bible school class you attended because your parents, who didn’t attend church, had you attend every year. He makes you privy to the gospel in a Christian song you just happened to bump into but for some reason you can’t get the moving lyrics out of your head. An old hymn which used to get my attention is a case in point:

Up Calv’ry’s mounting one dreadful morn,
Walked Christ, my Savior, weary and worn;
Facing for sinners death on the cross,
That He might save them from endless loss
Blessed Redeemer! Precious Redeemer!
Seems now I see Him on Calvary’s tree;

⁹ Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament: Baker’s Greek New Testament Library* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. BibleWorks, v.8),

Wounded and bleeding, for sinners pleading,
Blinded and unheeding, dying for me.¹⁰

Maybe for you it is a Chris Tomlin song from his *Love Ran Red* album, or a talk you heard in a Bible study at the Pentagon, or . . . well, you can certainly fill in the blanks because right now the Spirit of God has already put His divine finger on when you heard that unique, paradigm challenging, and life-giving gospel of God which is only received by faith, not by faith plus works.

Just to make sure we all understand how a sinner has historically secured spiritual purification in God's holy sight, Paul climaxes his teaching with a loose quote from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, chapter 2 verse 4:

The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17).

Habakkuk was a prophet of God who struggled with the fact that the sinful slide of Israel seemed to go on unchecked (Hab. 2:2-4). His question was simple, "God, when are you going to judge sin and establish righteousness?" He didn't expect God's answer. In verses 5 through 11 God informed the struggling, frustrated prophet He would use the wicked Babylonian army to bring the long-needed judgment for sin. When Habakkuk pushed back against God using a nation more wicked than God's nation, Israel, God arrested his attention telling him that the prophecy would occur and that He needed him, as a godly man, to live by faith. In other words, God told the prophet to trust that His impending action was the wisest, so He, therefore, needed the prophet to trust Him above all else, even above his own logical reasoning.

Paul takes this ancient statement and applies it directly to the purifying power of the gospel. For those who desire a true relationship with the living, holy God, it has always been based on a sinner living by faith in the fact that faith in God's gospel moves the sinner instantaneously from sinner to saint.

For years, Martin Luther failed to understand the import of these Pauline words. Professor Bruce Shelley recounts Luther's faith-plus-works approach to securing spiritual purification:

Luther pushed his body to health cracking rigors of austerity. He sometimes fasted for three days and slept without a blanket and freezing winter. He was driven by a profound sense of his own sinfulness and of God's unutterable majesty. In the midst of saying his first Mass, said Luther, "I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine majesty? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin, and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God." No amount of evidence, the soothing advice from his superiors could sue Luther's conviction that he was a miserable,

¹⁰Harry Dixon Loes and Avis B. Christiansen, *Blessed Redeemer*.

doomed sinner. Although this confess our counsel and to love God, Luther one-day burst out, "I do not love God! I hate him."¹¹

Later the spiritually searching monk was assigned as chair of biblical studies at Wittenberg University. In his studies there he became fascinated with Christ words from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Luther saw himself as a sinner, but he couldn't understand how Jesus, the perfect son of God to make this statement, ever. Yet Luther, the searching man, was beginning to understand the significance of the substitutionary death of Jesus in behalf of all sinful man of all time.

Purification came to Luther finally and 1515 when he was studying Paul's epistle to the Romans. He was absolutely captivated convicted by the words of Romans 1:17, "for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, but the righteous shall live by faith." Luther's tells us what happened next, "Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. There upon I felt myself to be reborn and you have gone through open doors into paradise."¹²

What did Luther get? He cognitively understood that the sinner doesn't become a saint by his faith plus his works, but by faith alone in the purifying power of the gospel of God. I am convinced there are plenty of Luthers among us today who needed to get that same message resolved in their lives. If that is you, Jesus waits for you to step out by faith and embrace His gospel. It will prove to be the most important decision you will ever make.

¹¹Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 256.

¹²*Ibid.*, 257