

EXPLANATION OF 45TH BIBLEBOOK

ROMANS 1:1-17 (April A.D. 67)

INTRODUCTION

Romans 1:1-7 contains the call and task of the writer, the apostle Paul.

And Romans 1:8-17 contains the introduction of the subject of the letter to the Romans.

Romans 1:16 says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Paul's letter to the Romans teaches the power of the gospel! It teaches that the gospel is God's power to justify people and it is God's power to sanctify people. *The gospel is God's message about how people may be saved and transformed to become new people!*

OUTLINE

Paul introduces the two great themes of the letter to the Romans:

The method of justification (faith) and the recipients of justification (believers).

Theme. The writer and the recipients.

(I) 1:1-7. The introduction of the writer: his calling and task.

- a. Paul is appointed and sent by God to proclaim the gospel (1:1).
- b. The gospel was already promised by the prophets of the Old Testament (1:2).
- c. The content of the gospel is Jesus Christ. He was born with his human nature in a state of humiliation, but he was resurrected with his human nature in a state of exaltation (1:3-4).
- d. It is from Jesus Christ that Paul received the gracious gift of apostleship to call the Gentiles to the obedience of faith (1:5).
- e. Paul writes to all who are set-apart (saints) and belong to Jesus Christ by virtue of having been effectively called by God (1:6-7).

(II) 1:8-17. The introduction of the recipients and the message.

- a. Paul thanks God that the faith of the Christians in Rome has influence everywhere (1:8).
- b. Paul serves God by proclaiming the gospel and by praying for people (1:9-10).
- c. Paul desires to come to them, meet them and encourage them in order to have a harvest among them (1:11-13).
- d. As an apostle Paul stands under the obligation to preach the gospel to all kinds of people (1:14-15).
- e. The gospel effectively saves everyone who believes without differentiating between people (1:16).
- f. The gospel teaches the true method of justification (namely, by faith) and the recipients of justification (namely, the believers in Jesus Christ from every nation) (1:17).

EXPLANATION

(I) 1:1-7. The introduction of the writer: his calling and task.

- a. Paul is appointed and sent by God to proclaim the gospel (1:1).

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1:1. Paul, a servant¹ of Christ Jesus, a called² apostle, one set apart (by a boundary)³ (vprp)⁴ for the gospel of God

The letter to the Romans was not an invention of any human being, but is an inspired revelation of *the meaning of the gospel* to a very special person, the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul introduces himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, called and appointed to be an apostle and set apart to preach the gospel of God. *The message of the gospel is above all, not what people must do to be saved, but what God has done in Jesus Christ to save people.*

Paul's main task was to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, that is, one sent by Jesus Christ to serve Jesus Christ by proclaiming the gospel, especially to the Gentiles⁵. The eleven disciples of Jesus and Paul were the only 'apostles of Jesus Christ', because they were chosen, called and trained by Jesus himself⁶ and had seen Jesus⁷. Their task was to be eye-witnesses of his resurrection⁸ and to record the New Testament Scriptures⁹.

The others apostles in the New Testament were 'apostles of the churches', in the sense of representatives sent out by these churches to proclaim the gospel and plant new congregations (cf. 16:7)¹⁰.

- b. The gospel was already promised by the prophets of the Old Testament (1:2).

¹ G (= the original Greek text of the New Testament): doulos

² G: klétos

³ G: aforizó. Af + horizó = to determine, appoint, set limits, define . Cf pro + horizó, predetermined (Romans 8:29)

⁴ Grammatical form of verbs: (here: v=verb, p=participle, r=perfect, p=passive)

Mood: i=indicative, s=subjunctive, o=optative, m=imperative, n=infinitive, p=participle, r=participle with imperative sense

Tense: p=present, i=imperfect, f=future, a=aorist, r=perfect, l=pluperfect

Voice: a=active, m=middle, p=passive, d=middle deponent

Case: n=nominative, g=genitive, d=dative, a=accusative, v=vocative

⁵ Galatians 2:8

⁶ Mark 3:13-15; Galatians 1:11-17

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:9

⁸ John 15:27; Acts 1:21-22; 1 Corinthians 15:8

⁹ John 14:26; 2 Peter 3:1-2,15-16

¹⁰ Act 14:14; Philipians 2:25

1:2. which he promised beforehand¹¹ (viad) through his prophets in (the) Holy Scriptures.

This gospel message of the New Testament was already in part promised, displayed and recorded in the Old Testament! What Christ revealed to Paul about the gospel, was in complete harmony with what the Old Testament prophets taught. There is thus complete continuation between the Old Testament and the New Testament! The main content of the gospel in both the Old Testament and New Testament is: salvation through Jesus Christ only and justification through faith alone!

c. The content of the gospel is Jesus Christ.

He was born with his human nature in a state of humiliation, but he was resurrected with his human nature in a state of exaltation (1:3-4).

1:3. concerning his Son, who according to the flesh (i.e. as to his human nature)¹² was¹³ (vpad) a descendant of David, 1:4. but in accordance with the Spirit of holiness was, by means of the resurrection from the dead, appointed (decreed, declared)¹⁴ (vpap) to be the Son of God invested with power, namely, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The subject of the gospel is Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. The death of Jesus Christ without his resurrection would have had no meaning!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves God's acceptance of Christ's completed work of salvation. No other prophet who ever lived in history or made a claim to be a prophet has been *resurrected* from the dead! All the prophets of other religions in this world still lie in their graves. Jesus Christ is the only human being who has ever been resurrected from the dead and still lives! This fact proves that *Jesus Christ was the Greatest Prophet of all times!* His resurrection *proves that God accepted his death as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ manifests the present exalted state of Jesus Christ in heaven. Jesus Christ claimed to be the Saviour of the world and the Lord of the universe. His resurrection from the dead is the conclusive evidence of the validity of all his claims. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most powerful demonstration of the truth of all his teachings.

The contrast between verse 3 and 4 is not between the human and divine nature of Christ, but between two elements within the human nature of Christ. Verse 3 says what Christ was before his resurrection and verse 4 says what he became by virtue of his resurrection. The contrast is between the state of humiliation of Christ's human nature before his resurrection and the state of exaltation of his human nature after his resurrection! Jesus Christ was always the Son of God, that is, he always possessed the divine nature (9:5)¹⁵.

But before his resurrection, his human nature is described as 'flesh', that is, weak due to sin and death. His human nature was weak due to the sin of the world which he took on himself and due to the fact that he was still going to die for these sins. *But in his death, he laid aside the weakness of his human nature and severed every connection with sin and death.*

*At the resurrection of his human nature, his human nature was transformed and is described as 'the Spirit of holiness' (1:4) or as 'the life-giving Spirit'¹⁶. His resurrected human nature is powerful and so completely endowed with the Holy Spirit and so fully in control of the Holy Spirit, that he is identified with the Holy Spirit and is called 'the Lord, who is the Spirit'¹⁷. The resurrection of Jesus Christ instated him in a position of *lordship above all and everything¹⁸. This lordship is totally conditioned by the Holy Spirit!**

d. It is from Jesus Christ that Paul received the gracious gift of apostleship to call the Gentiles to the obedience of faith (1:5).

1:5. through whom and for whose name's sake we (writer's plural) received (viaa) the grace (gracious gift, exceptional effects produced by divine grace above and beyond those usually experienced by ordinary Christians, the gracious commission)(cf. 15:15) of apostleship, in order to bring about¹⁹ obedience of faith²⁰, among all the Gentiles.

It is from this divine and human Person, Jesus Christ, that Paul received his task to be an apostle. The purpose of his task was to bring people to faith in Christ. His field of labour was not only his own town, but also the other nations.

¹¹ G: pro-epaggelló

¹² G: kata sarka

¹³ G: ginomai

¹⁴ G: horizó

¹⁵ Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; John 1:1; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20; Hebrews 2:8; Revelation 1:8; 2:8; 22:13

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:45

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁸ Philippians 2:9-11

¹⁹ G: eis

²⁰ G: hup-akoén pisteós

The original text says that Paul received grace and apostleship (the gracious gift of apostleship) with a view to bring about obedience of faith among all the nations. As apostle, Paul's task was to preach the gospel so that people in all nations may be brought to the obedience of faith.

How should we understand the words 'obedience of faith'? It is possible to interpret this as 'obedience to the Christian faith', that is, 'faith' in objective sense as 'the teachings or doctrines of Christianity'. However, it is better to understand this as 'obedience that consists in faith', that is, 'faith' in subjective sense as 'a personal relationship of trust with Jesus Christ'.

Genuine Christian obedience is characterised by believing in Jesus Christ²¹ and genuine Christian faith is characterised by obedience to Christ²². The implications are enormous.

The 'faith' that Paul preached was not simply *a one-time act of accepting* Christ as Saviour. The *kind of faith* that Paul intended to promote was *a lifetime commitment of trust and of obedience* to Christ as Saviour and Lord. By preaching the gospel, the apostle Paul called people to a life of wholehearted devotion to Jesus Christ and his teachings.

e. Paul writes to all who are set-apart (saints) and belong to Jesus Christ
by virtue of having been effectively called by God (1:6-7).

1:6. among whom are (vipa) also you, the effectively called²³ of Jesus Christ.

1:7. to all who are (vppa) in Rome beloved of God, saints by virtue of having been effectively called²⁴. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's field of labour included the people living in Rome. Paul often began his letters by wishing the Christians God's grace and God's peace.

The word 'call' may have two different meanings.

The outward call. John the Baptist said that he was "the voice of one *calling* in the desert"²⁵. John means that by his preaching, he called the people of Israel to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ²⁶. In this sense, the word 'call' refers to *the outward call* of God, in which he invites people through the preaching of the gospel to believe in Jesus Christ. Often the outward call is disregarded²⁷.

The inward call. The word 'call' is used almost exclusively in one sense in the Bible, namely, *the inner call* of God, in which he draws the people whom he chose before the creation of the world irresistibly to Jesus Christ. "From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He *called* you to this through our gospel"²⁸.

There are always people who receive the outward call through the preaching of the gospel, but disregard it and remain unbelievers²⁹. But everyone who receives the inner call through the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts³⁰, will irresistibly come to Jesus Christ³¹. It is in the sense of God's inner call that Paul uses the word in Romans 1:6-7. The Christians in Rome belong to Jesus Christ and are saints *by virtue of having been irresistibly and effectively called by God through the work of his Holy Spirit in their hearts*. They have become Christians, not because of anything in themselves, but only because of God's irresistible and effective call.

The people "over whom the name of the Lord has been called"³² designates the people God elected. They consequently belong to him. Thus, the people whom God *called* are the people whom God *chose*. The people whom God *called* are the people whom God *predestined* to be saved and conformed to the likeness of Christ (8:28-34)³³. 'The called' has virtually the same meaning as 'the elected'. It is the designation of genuine believers³⁴. By virtue of this effective call, the Christians at Rome were made to belong to Christ and were made 'saints' (people set apart for God).

Note: the word 'church' in Greek is 'ekklésia' and means 'God's called out people'. Paul greets them in the name of the God who revealed himself through all the prophets in the Old Testament and finally in Jesus Christ in the New Testament³⁵.

²¹ John 6:28-29

²² John 14:21,23

²³ G: klétoi

²⁴ G: klétois hagiois

²⁵ Isaiah 40:3

²⁶ John 1:23

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:23

²⁸ 2 Thessalonians 2:13

²⁹ Matthew 22:14

³⁰ John 16:8

³¹ John 6:44,37

³² perfect tense (Acts 15:17)

³³ 1 Corinthians 1:24-30

³⁴ Revelation 17:14; Jude 1:1

³⁵ Hebrews 1:1-2

(II) 1:8-17. The introduction of the recipients and the message.

a. Paul thanks God that the faith of the Christians in Rome has influence everywhere (1:8).

1:8. First, I keep on thanking (vipa) my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is continually being reported (talked about)³⁶ (vip) all over the world.

The subject of the letter to the Romans is “*salvation by faith for both the Jew and the Gentile.*” Paul introduces in a very respectable way the greatest subject in preaching. He expresses his respect and affection to the Christians in Rome. He thanks God for their faith and that their faith has influence everywhere. Their faith is reported all over the world³⁷, probably because Rome was the capital and many people travelled to and from Rome.

b. Paul serves God by proclaiming the gospel and by praying for people (1:9-10).

1:9. for God, whom I constantly serve (vipa) in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, is (vipa) my witness, how unceasingly I make (vipm) mention (remembrance) of you

1:10. at all times³⁸ in my prayers, continually asking (making a request)³⁹ (vppn) if somehow⁴⁰ now at last⁴¹, by God’s will, I will succeed in my journey⁴² (vifp)(i.e. the good way may be opened) to come (vnaa) to you.

Paul serves (worships) God with his spirit, that is, wholeheartedly, in the gospel of God’s Son. This service in the gospel includes living, setting an example, preaching, praying, encouraging and dedicating his life and abilities to God⁴³. That service is effective because of Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, outpouring of his Spirit, his reign and intercession.

Paul expresses his concern for the believers in Rome by constantly praying for them and by making known his longing to come to visit them. So in his prayers he *asks God for an open door* to visit Rome.

c. Paul desires to come to them, meet them and encourage them in order to have a harvest among them (1:11-13).

1:11. For I long⁴⁴ (vipa) to see (vnaa) you, so that I may impart⁴⁵ (vsaa) to you some spiritual gift⁴⁶ in order that⁴⁷ you may be strengthened⁴⁸ (vnap) (by God)(passive voice)

1:12. that is (vipa), to be mutually encouraged (vnap) among you by one another’s faith, both yours and mine.

Paul desires to visit the Christians in Rome in order to strengthen them, to encourage one another and to have a harvest among them.

The spiritual gift Paul wants to impart is not any specific gift of the Spirit, but rather the spiritual strengthening of the Christians at Rome. Paul is humble enough to express that the faith of the Christians at Rome would certainly also encourage him!

11:13. I do not want (vipa) you to be unaware (ignorant)⁴⁹ (vnpa), brothers, that often (frequently)⁵⁰ I planned (purposed)⁵¹ (viam) to come (vnaa) to you - but have been prevented (hindered)⁵² (viap) until now (here: thus far)(achri deuro) - in order that I might have⁵³ (vsaa) some fruit also among you, as also (I have had) among the rest of the Gentiles.

³⁶ G: kat-aggelló

³⁷ 1 Thessalonians 1:8

³⁸ G: pantote

³⁹ G: deomai

⁴⁰ G: pós

⁴¹ G: édé pote

⁴² G: eu-odoó, led along a good road

⁴³ 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7

⁴⁴ G: epi-pothéó

⁴⁵ G: meta-didómi

⁴⁶ G: charisma pneumatikon

⁴⁷ G: eis to

⁴⁸ G: stérizó

⁴⁹ G: agnoeó

⁵⁰ G: pollakis

⁵¹ G: pro-tithémi

⁵² G: kóluó

⁵³ G: schó

Paul desires to have ‘some fruit’ among the believers at Rome. ‘Fruit’ may be doing good works⁵⁴, doing God’s will⁵⁵, displaying Christian character⁵⁶, winning new believers to Christ⁵⁷ or making disciples⁵⁸.

d. As an apostle Paul stands under the obligation to preach the gospel to all kinds of people (1:14-15).

1:14. To both Greeks and barbarians (people who do not speak Greek properly), to both wise (learned) and ignorant (unlearned)⁵⁹ I constantly am (vipa) a debtor⁶⁰.

1:15. – thus my eagerness⁶¹ to preach the gospel⁶² (vnam) also to you in Rome.

Paul was probably converted on his way to Damascus in Syria in A.D. 34⁶³. He stayed for three years in Nabatean Arabia (close to Damascus) and then first went to Jerusalem to meet Peter and James in A.D. 36. After that he ministered in Syria and Cilicia for about eight years⁶⁴. Barnabas involved Paul in the ministry in Antioch in Syria in A.D. 44⁶⁵. They delivered the gifts of the Gentile church in Syria to the Jewish church in Jerusalem in A.D. 46⁶⁶. They met with the other apostles and the elders of the church of Jerusalem to decide on the issue of justification by circumcision or faith in A.D. 50⁶⁷. The apostles in Jerusalem saw that Paul had been entrusted with preaching the gospel to the Gentiles just as Peter had been to the Jews. God who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews was also at work in the ministry of Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles. When they recognised the grace given to Paul, James, Peter and John gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship and they agreed that Paul and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles while they went to the Jews⁶⁸.

Now during his third missionary journey (A.D. 52-57) Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (A.D. 57) and Paul still regarded himself as a debtor to Greek speaking people and all the other foreigners living in the world, whether learned and unlearned. And that is why he was eager to also preach the gospel to people in the capital of the Roman Empire, Rome.

1:16. For I am never ashamed⁶⁹ (vipn) of the gospel, because it always is (vipa) the power of God for the salvation for everyone who continues to exercise faith (continues to believe)(vppa): for the Jew first and also for the Greek (the Greek speaking non-Jews became a term for the Gentiles).

Paul’s eagerness to preach the gospel arose from his clear understanding of the gospel. The gospel is not simply a message, but a powerful means by which God saves all the people who believe, without distinction of race and culture. The gospel is powerful and very effective, because it teaches the true method of justification, that is, the true way of salvation. The only way of salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the power of God. The gospel (means ‘the good news’) is the power of God, because it is that message through which God works and through which he saves people. God saves people not through human power and human wisdom, but through the gospel⁷⁰. The power and wisdom of God in the gospel is not manifested through a message about

‘one God’ (the pure theism of Jewish religion) or a message about a perfect moral code (the ethical life of Greek religion), but rather through a message about a crucified Redeemer and justification by faith in him. “Jesus Christ and him crucified”, is the beginning (Alpha) and the end (Omega) of the gospel message⁷¹.

The gospel has a powerful effect on individuals. Every believer in Jesus Christ is saved out of a certain state into another state. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is saved from certain evils in order to enjoy certain blessings. Every believer in Jesus Christ is saved from the following evils:

- He is saved from the *guilt* of sin, because God has forgiven all his sins.

⁵⁴ Luke 3:8

⁵⁵ Matthew 7:20-21

⁵⁶ Galatians 5:22-23

⁵⁷ Colossians 1:6

⁵⁸ John 15:16; cf. 7:4

⁵⁹ G: a-noétos

⁶⁰ G: opheiletés

⁶¹ G: pro-thumos (ho thumos, passion, rage)

⁶² G: eu-aggelizomai

⁶³ Galatians 1:11-17

⁶⁴ Galatians 1:18-24

⁶⁵ Acts 11:25-26; Galatians 1:18-24

⁶⁶ Acts 11:27-30

⁶⁷ Acts 15; Galatians 2:1-5

⁶⁸ Galatians 2:6-10

⁶⁹ G: ep-aischunomai (he aischuné, shame)

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:20-25

⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:2; Galatians 5:11; 6:14

- He is saved from the *shame* of sin, because God has given him a new name, family and self-esteem.
- He is saved from the *pollution* of sin, because the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on the cross has cleansed him.
- He is saved from the *slavery* to sin, because Christ set him free from the enslaving power of sin.
- He is saved from the eternal *punishment* of sin, which consists of separation from God, the wrath of God and everlasting death, because Jesus Christ had taken that punishment in his place onto himself!

Every believer in Christ is saved to enjoy the following blessings.

- He graciously receives from God the state of perfect righteousness in the eyes of God and consequently forgiveness of all sins, acceptance into God's family and complete assurance of salvation.
- He graciously receives from God the state of perfect holiness and consequently the ability to grow in holiness (sanctification) and to live a transformed and fruitful life. He is saved in order to enjoy God's blessings, which consists of personal fellowship with God, the love of God and everlasting life.

The gospel has a powerful effect on nations. The gospel saves people from every nation in the world! No matter what a person's previous nationality, culture or religion was, when he believes in Jesus Christ he will certainly be saved! The Bible says, "for the Jew first and also for the Greek (the non-Jew)".

The word 'first' does not mean 'especially', because the gospel was not specially designed for the Jews (3:9,22,29; 10:12). It means '*first in time*', because the gospel was first preached to the Jews (10:14-21)⁷² and then preached by them to the Greek speaking Gentiles with whom the Jews were most familiar at that time⁷³. They represent the Gentiles from every nation on earth.

f. The gospel teaches the true method of justification (namely, by faith)
and the recipients of justification,
(namely, the believers in Jesus Christ from every nation) (1:17).

The righteousness from God that is revealed in the gospel (1:17a).

1:17. For in it (the gospel) a righteousness⁷⁴ from God is *constantly* revealed⁷⁵ (vipp) from faith⁷⁶ to faith⁷⁷; just as is written (virp): "The righteous (person) by faith⁷⁸ shall live (vifm)" (i.e. the righteous shall live their lives by faith).

The righteousness from God cannot here be understood as an attribute or characteristic of God, because it is attained by faith and given to believers. The word 'righteousness' has been interpreted differently by different people.

(1) Righteousness is not something earned or established by man. The religious Jews were zealously seeking to establish their own righteousness by keeping the law. They regarded 'righteousness' as the religious and moral righteousness of Jewish believers.

But the Jews (and other religions like them) did not know that righteousness is not something that comes from people and is also not earned or attained by what people do. Righteousness comes from God: it is *established by Jesus Christ* and is *given by God* to people who believe in Jesus Christ (10:3-4)⁷⁹. People must "know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ"⁸⁰.

One group of Christians in the world today think that God justifies people when first the Church baptises them with water and afterwards they do good works. They believe that at baptism with water, God's grace is poured into them so that they become inherently righteous and are able to do righteous or good works afterwards. Therefore they also regard 'righteousness' as *the religious and moral righteousness of man*.

Another group of Christians in the world today also think that God justifies people by their own act of believing in the gospel and by their own acts of obedience to the law and the teachings of Jesus Christ afterwards. They view God's grace as universal, enabling all people to believe if they choose to believe. They view *faith and evangelical obedience as the personal acts of the free will of man* by which they are then justified. Therefore they also regard 'righteousness' as *the religious and moral righteousness of man*.

However, righteousness is *not* something that is *earned or established* by man!

(2) Righteousness is something merited and attained by Christ for man. No one can establish his own righteousness, because righteousness comes from God (3:21)⁸¹! In the whole letter to the Romans, *righteousness is not something that is*

⁷² Matthew 10:5-6; Acts 13:46-47;

⁷³ Matthew 28:19

⁷⁴ G: dikaiosuné

⁷⁵ G: apo-kaluptó

⁷⁶ G: ek pisteós

⁷⁷ G: eis pistin

⁷⁸ G: ek pisteós

⁷⁹ Philippians 3:9

⁸⁰ Galatians 2:16

⁸¹ cf. Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9

attained by the believer himself! Righteousness is not established by anything that is done in the believer by the Church and also not by anything that is done by the believer himself.

Righteousness is something that comes from God and is established by what Jesus Christ *did* for the believer. Righteousness is something which Jesus Christ *merited* by his death and resurrection and thus *attained* for the believer.

By a complete righteous life on earth and his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus Christ satisfied the righteous indignation of God against sin and earned or merited the required righteousness for everyone who believes in him. The righteous Christ dies for the sins of the unrighteous people in order to bring them to God⁸². Jesus Christ paid the complete penalty for sin in the place of the many people who believe in him⁸³. Righteousness is the complete satisfaction of God's holy and just indignation against all sin, God's declaration of complete forgiveness of all sins and his perfect acceptance of believers into his family. Righteousness is therefore the judicial righteousness of God.

⁸² 1 Peter 3:18a; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁸³ Mark 10:45; John 10:11

Righteousness is something given (imputed) by God and applied (imparted) by the Spirit to the believer. God graciously gives this perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ to all who believe in Jesus Christ. God as Judge declares these believers completely (100%) righteous and from then on regards and treats them as perfectly (100%) righteous in his eyes! Righteousness is therefore *not the religious and moral righteousness of man (the believer), but the judicial righteousness of God!*

Christ does for man what he cannot do for himself: he merits God's required righteousness by living, dying and being resurrected for man and in man's place. Then God imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer, that is, he ascribes, reckons, counts Christ's righteousness to the believer, declares the believer righteous and forever regards and treats the believer as righteous in his eyes. Thereafter God never regards or treats the believer as 'guilty' anymore, but always as 'righteous', even when the believer still has a sinful nature and commits sin⁸⁴.

The sacrifice for all sins has been made once in history for all who believe that Jesus Christ died in their place for all their sins. Jesus Christ paid the penalty once for all. Thereafter God will never bring their sins or lawless acts into remembrance anymore⁸⁵!

Righteousness is something received by the believer. The believer receives this righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith! It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that justifies (saves) the believer and the believer receives this righteousness by faith.

The faith by which a person is made righteous (1:17b). The faith by which God justifies or saves a person (that is, which makes this person righteous in God's eyes) has three aspects:

- **The first aspect of faith is knowledge.** In order to believe in something, we must know what to believe. Thus, faith is an understanding of the truth as it is revealed in the Bible. Romans 10:14-17 says that 'faith' comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the preaching of the word of Christ. Faith is therefore based on knowledge of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ. The knowledge consists of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This knowledge is given to us when others preach the gospel to us. Thus, receiving the knowledge necessary for faith is based on God's grace (undeserved favour).
- **The second aspect of faith is trust.** After we understand the truth, we still have to believe or trust that this truth is also the truth for us personally. With our mind and heart we believe that God imputes (reckons, ascribes, counts) the righteousness of Christ to us, so that when God looks at us, he only sees the righteousness of Christ! We rely or depend on the fact that God declared us completely righteous, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Acts 16:14 says that it is God who opens our hearts to respond by faith to the gospel message. The faith that saves is gift of God and not our accomplishment. "It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this (faith) (is) not from yourselves, it is the gift of God"⁸⁶. The kind of faith which saves is the intelligent perception, reception, and reliance on the truth as it is revealed in the gospel. Thus, even faith as a personal persuasion, conviction and trust is based on God's grace (undeserved favour).
- **The third aspect of faith is action.** When we genuinely believe the truth of the gospel, we respond to it with action: we receive the truth and we confess the truth. The faith in our mind and heart that Jesus Christ is the Saviour and that he offers us complete salvation is expressed by receiving Christ himself (the Spirit of Christ) together with his completed work of salvation into our hearts and lives⁸⁷.

And faith is expressed by confessing Christ openly as Saviour and Lord with our mouths. There is complete agreement between what we believe in our hearts and what we confess with our mouths. Romans 10:9-10 says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (10:9).

The faith that saves or justifies can be compared with *the sinner's empty hand* that is stretched out to God, the Giver,

in order to receive God's gracious gift of salvation (Christ himself and his righteousness). The faith that saves or justifies, results in both a state of righteousness in God's eyes and in a personal relationship with Christ. The faith that saves or justifies, is like *the coupling* that connects man's train (life) with God's engine (grace). The faith that saves or justifies, is symbolised by *the trunk of a tree*, whose roots represent God's grace and whose fruit symbolises a life of gratitude and good works⁸⁸.

Salvation is only for believers in Jesus Christ (1:17c). The phrase "from faith to faith" has been interpreted as a progressive phrase: "from a weak faith to a more perfect faith" or as an intensive phrase: "by faith alone", or "by faith from beginning to end."

⁸⁴ 1 John 1:8 – 2:2

⁸⁵ Hebrews 8:12; 10:17-18

⁸⁶ Acts 13:48; 18:27; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:1

⁸⁷ John 1:12; Revelation 3:20

⁸⁸ Ephesians 2:8-10

However, a similar phrase is used in Romans 3:21-22. A righteousness from God has been manifested in the Old Testament (Law and Prophets), a righteousness that is “*through* faith (in Jesus Christ)⁸⁹ (referring to the means) *to* all who believe”⁹⁰ (referring to the recipients). Thus the phrase means; “through faith to believers.”

Another similar phrase is used in Galatians 3:21-22. The promise (of righteousness) is given “*through* faith⁹¹(the means) *to* those who believe”⁹² (the recipients).

Likewise, the best translation of Romans 1:17 is: “The gospel reveals a righteousness that comes from God. This righteousness is only *by faith* (the means)(and not by works of the law) and is given *to everyone who believes* (the recipients)(without distinction of his race, culture or degree of faith)!”

The righteousness is attained by Christ in his death and resurrection. Christ’s accomplishment in his death is *the ground of righteousness*. The righteousness is given by God in his unimaginable mercy and grace (love). God’s love (grace and mercy) is *the Source of righteousness*. The believers are *the recipients of righteousness*. The righteousness is received by faith. Faith is *the means of receiving this righteousness*.

Saved (righteous) people will live by faith (1:17a). The phrase “the righteous by faith shall live” does not speak about ‘becoming righteous by faith’, but about ‘living by faith’. The words ‘by faith’⁹³ in the quotation from Habakkuk is not connected to ‘the righteous’, but to ‘shall live’. The phrase has been interpreted to mean ‘the righteous (person) by (means of his own act of) faith, shall live (shall have eternal life)’. Thus, the person’s ‘faith’ is regarded as *the ground* for eternal life. This translation and interpretation does not agree with the teaching in the Bible. Faith is never the ground for salvation; only *the means* of receiving salvation. The quotation in Romans 1:17 is from Habakkuk 2:4 and can only be translated: “the righteous (person) will live (his life on earth before God or in God’s presence) by faith (trust)”.

The prophecy in the book of Habakkuk. The prophet Habakkuk prophesied during the reign of king Jehoiakim (608-597 B.C.) just before the second invasion of the Babylonians in 597 B.C. The prophet was bothered by what seemed as the wicked getting away with their wickedness.

In the first part of his prophecy *his faith is tested*⁹⁴. The prophet’s first question was: “Why does the Lord allow the wicked people in Judah to oppress the righteous?”⁹⁵. The Lord answered, “The Chaldeans will come as a punishment for the wicked”⁹⁶. His second question was, “Why does the Lord allow the Jews to be punished by the Chaldeans who are even more wicked than the Jews?”⁹⁷. The Lord answered, “Also the Chaldeans will be punished; in fact all sinners will be punished. But the righteous will live by faith”⁹⁸. The sins of Judah and of the Chaldeans are summarised as follows: “Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion. Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain and plot the ruin of many peoples. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and established a town by crime. Woe to him who promotes the abuse of alcohol and sexual immorality, delighting in other peoples’ misery and shame. Woe to him who makes his own god and trusts in his own creation”.

But “the righteous will live by faith”. It is the duty and privilege of the righteous to trust God even when he is not able to figure out the justice of God’s actions. In humble trust and quiet confidence the righteous person shall truly live and prosper.

In the second part of his prophecy *his faith is strengthened*⁹⁹. The Lord not only tells the prophet that he should exercise faith, but actually strengthens his faith by means of a vision. He saw the Lord descend onto the earth and shake the whole earth so that all the nations tremble. The prophet’s third question was, “On who is the Lord’s wrath going to fall – on the realm of nature or perhaps on Judah?” Finally the Lord answered, “The Lord will destroy the Chaldeans and deliver his people (the righteous). Having witnessed the Lord’s descent for the defence of his people, the prophet no longer questions the ways of the Lord’s providence (sovereign reign on earth). From then on *the prophet waits patiently for the day of calamity (the invasion of the Babylonians) and expresses his trust in a beautiful song: “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”*

⁸⁹ G: dia pisteós

⁹⁰ G: eis pantas tous pisteuontas

⁹¹ G: ek pisteós

⁹² G: tois pisteuousin

⁹³ G: ek pisteós

⁹⁴ Habakkuk 1:1 – 2:20

⁹⁵ Habakkuk 1:1-4

⁹⁶ Habakkuk 1:5-11

⁹⁷ Habakkuk 1:12 - 2:1

⁹⁸ Habakkuk 2:2-20

⁹⁹ Habakkuk 3:1-19

The prophecy applied in the letter to the Romans. Romans 1:16 emphasises faith as *the means* by which a person is *justified (saved)*. And Romans 1:17d emphasises faith (trust) as *the way or lifestyle of the justified (saved) person*. Thus, in both the Old Testament period and the New Testament period the emphasis is on the fact that believers in the LORD are justified (saved) only by faith and continue to live their lives (as justified or saved people) only by faith, by trust.

Thus, Paul introduces the two great subjects of his letter to the Romans.

- *Lost people can only be justified by faith*
- *and saved people will live their lives by faith (trust)*.

This is true for all people in the world, Jews and Gentiles.