

**Romans (4):
Paul's Introduction to his Epistle (1:16, 17)**

Introduction:

The apostle Paul gave great detail and length to his initial greeting to this church at Rome (1:1-15). He employed the first 15 verses of chapter 1 to identify himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, commend himself to the saints at Rome, and express to them his desire to visit them and minister to them in person. He then took two verses, verses 15 and 16, to introduce the theme of his epistle. But where a cursory glance at these two verses may give an impression that they contain little substance, this formal introduction in these two verses is actually quite a laden statement, in which Paul suggests not only his major theme, which is the gospel, but he also set forth the scheme of the argument of his epistle, as we will see.

I. The meaning of Paul's words in the introduction to his epistle (Rom. 1:16, 17)

Let us read these verses in which Paul formerly introduces the theme and argument of his epistle:

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. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Rom. 1:16f)

We will attempt to understand the meaning of these two sentences separately, although they are vitally connected.

A. “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.” (Rom. 1:16)

1. “*For I am not ashamed* of the gospel...”

The word, “for”, is a conjunction that introduces an explanation for something that Paul had already asserted. In verse 15 he had written, “So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.” Why was Paul eager to do so? Verse 16 provides his answer, “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.” Paul was convinced that the power of God to bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles was manifested through the gospel. He had such confidence of God's power in the gospel to save sinners that he would be bold and willing to come among them and make this gospel known. Paul knew that fruit would be the result of God working through the gospel among those in Rome.

Now, why would the apostle make the statement, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel”? Why would Paul, or anyone, for that matter, might be ashamed of the gospel, when it brings eternal blessings to sinners? There are several reasons. *First of all, there is a natural antipathy of fallen human beings toward the truth of God and toward His Son.* This unreasoned hatred toward God exists due to our fallen condition. The Scriptures tell us that we are sinners by nature; that is, each of us has hostility and resistance toward the authority that God and His laws have over us. We do not want to be ruled by anyone or anything outside of ourselves.

Jesus instructed His disciples that the world would be hostile toward them for the world hates God and God's people.

³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

³³They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

³⁷“I know that you are offspring of Abraham; *yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.* ³⁸I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

³⁹They answered him, “Abraham is our father.”

Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰but *now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.* This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹You are doing the works your father did.”

They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”

⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but He sent me. ⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? *It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him.* When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?” (John 8:31-46)

Later the Lord told His disciples that the world would be hostile toward them, because of their association with Him.

¹⁸“*If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you.* ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, *therefore the world hates you.* ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ *If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.* If they kept My word, they will also keep yours. ²¹But all these things they will do to you on account of My name, because they do not know Him who sent Me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, *but now they have seen and hated both Me and my Father.* ²⁵*But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’”* (John 15:18-25)

And so, people are sometimes ashamed of the gospel, timid to align with the gospel, because they know intuitively that those about them will marginalize them, reject them, and even hate them. They know that *the threat of alienation and persecution* comes upon the one who has embraced and makes known the teaching of the gospel.

But the Lord Jesus called us not to be ashamed of Him and His gospel, but rather we are to wear this badge boldly and without fear or apology. The Lord Jesus had told His disciples,

³⁴And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸*For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*” (Mark 8:34-38)

A *second* reason why someone might be ashamed of the gospel is because of *the nature of the message itself*. Many regarded the gospel as foolishness, because it did not seem reasonable to them that God would save people by crucifying someone. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth,

¹⁸*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing*, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, *it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe*. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³*but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles*, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:18-24)

The gospel humbles the pride of men, and men (i.e. men and women) do not like to be humbled, for they are proud in nature. The gospel strips people of their pride, telling them that they are sinners, guilty of sin before God, that they are deserving and are under God’s wrath, and that they have no ability or means to lift themselves out of their condition. The gospel declares that God alone must come in His grace to set them free and pardon them of their sin through Jesus Christ. Proud sinners do not like the message of the cross, that Jesus Christ crucified is the only way of salvation. But Paul declared he was not ashamed of the gospel, rather, he proclaimed it boldly and without apology.

2. “For I am not ashamed *of the gospel*...”

This is the third use of the word “gospel” thus far in this epistle (cf. 1:1, 9); he uses it here in verse 15 and repeats it in verse 16. We have already defined the word as “good news.” Last week I mentioned off hand the common tendency to reduce the idea of the Gospel to a narrower understanding than what the Scriptures teach. I might say a few words about this here, but with better clarity of expression; some of which we relate may be a repetition of what I said last Lord’s day.

There are different and defective views of the definition of the gospel among those who profess to be Christian. For example, there are some have reduced the meaning of the gospel to *the good news of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ*. In other words, well-intentioned Bible believers, with the best of intentions, believe the gospel is the good news of justification by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. As we affirmed very strongly last week, justification is at the heart of the gospel. One cannot have a true, biblical gospel and be wrong on the teaching of justification. But to say that the gospel is equated with and restricted to the justification through faith alone is to reduce the gospel to a narrower definition that what the Bible teaches.

There are others, who take the matter a step farther, which I believe is a departure from the biblical gospel, in that they reduce the gospel to a be a message of forgiveness of sins through faith alone (justification), however, *they define saving faith as mere notional faith*, that is, saving faith is viewed as merely intellectual assent to the doctrine of justification through faith alone. They not only reduce the gospel to the message of justification through faith alone, but they empty faith of its essential biblical moorings, drifting into subtle but serious error respecting what constitutes saving faith. They teach that this kind of “believer”, who “believes only”, becomes justified through faith alone, but it is *through faith that is not evidenced in repentance from sin and obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord*.

This is quite common among evangelicals. I spoke to a young man this week, who is a sincere and true Christian, who was speaking about his church’s efforts at evangelism. He spoke of saving faith. I asked him about the necessity of repentance. He responded that repentance was a matter of the believer’s sanctification, but not of the justification of the believer. He had this deficient view of the gospel, in that he,

and perhaps his church, teaches that saving faith is merely understanding the doctrine and believing it, but with a “faith” that does not involve repentance. This is error.¹

But there is an even greater error than this that is common in evangelicalism, among those who claim to believe and follow only the teaching of the Bible as God’s Word. There are those who have reduced the gospel to the teaching of faith in Jesus as a mere assent, as the error above, but the “forgiveness” they offer is not principally the forgiveness of God toward guilty sinners who lie under the wrath of God for having lived in defiance of and in transgression of God’s law, **but rather their offer of “forgiveness” is a release or liberation from personal guilty feelings**, not actual guilt before God. The thought that they are in need of the atonement of sin before God, in order to be at peace with God, is not a problem for them, after all, “God loves everybody unconditionally.” “But your real problem”, they argue in agreement with most schools of psychology, “is the guilty feelings that you have within your conscience. You may solve this problem by “accepting Jesus as your personal Savior.” In this way you may no longer feel guilty about yourself, but you may feel loved and accepted. This is not the gospel. And although the problem of guilty feelings is something the true gospel addresses and resolves, **the real problem is our actual guilt before a holy Creator God whom we have ignored and whose laws we have disregarded and transgressed all of our lives**. The true gospel addresses the greatest need of forgiveness of our sins before God Himself through the atoning sacrifice of His Son.

The Gospel is the good news that God brings His salvation from sin to people through faith in Jesus Christ. But biblical salvation involves more than deliverance from the penalty of sin (justification), but it also involves the deliverance from the alienation of sin (reconciliation and adoption), the ongoing salvation from the power of sin (sanctification), and the final salvation from the presence of sin (glorification). To reduce the gospel to a message that results in anything less than the full salvation that God sets forth in His Word is dangerous to souls and is weakening the churches of Jesus Christ.

To show how readily the concept of the gospel is reduced to a less than biblical understanding, consider another aspect of the gospel that is commonly ignored or largely unknown to our evangelical movement. An aspect of the biblical gospel that is commonly disregarded or inadvertently ignored is the role of the promised **kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ**, or as it is often expressed, **the kingdom of God**, in the gospel message. The gospel in the New Testament involves the good news that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consider these verses:

Matthew 4:23. “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming **the gospel of the kingdom** and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Matthew 9:35. “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming **the gospel of the kingdom** and healing every disease and every affliction.”

Matthew 24:14. “And **this gospel of the kingdom** will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Acts 8:12. “But when they believed Philip as he preached **good news** (the gospel) **about the kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

Acts 19:8. “And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about **the kingdom of God**.”

Acts 20:25. “And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about **proclaiming the kingdom** will see my face again.”

¹ A very good treatment of this error is addressed in an essay on a movement known as Sandamanianism, which existed in the 1700’s. See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, **The Puritans, Their Origins and Successors** (Banner of Truth, 1987).

Acts 28:23. “When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, *testifying to the kingdom of God* and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.”

Acts 28:30f. “He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹*proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ* with all boldness and without hindrance.”

Acts 13:32-39. “And we bring you *the good news* (the gospel) that what God promised to the fathers, ³³this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’ ³⁴And as for the fact that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ ³⁵Therefore He says also in another psalm, ‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’ ³⁶For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷but He whom God raised up did not see corruption. ³⁸Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and by Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”

Romans 1:1-4. “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for *the gospel of God*, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³*concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh* ⁴*and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead*, Jesus Christ our Lord...”

We see in these passages that either the gospel is directly associated with the kingdom of Jesus Christ or it is implied in the emphasis that the kingdom of God is given in the ministry of the apostles. In my opinion the best way to describe and define the gospel is as it is set forth by the apostle in Romans 1:9, in which he wrote of *the gospel of God's Son*. The gospel includes all of God's promises and blessings of salvation that are given to us and secured to us by Jesus Christ.

3. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, *for it is the power of God for salvation...*”

What Paul meant by this is that the gospel is the power of God that *results* in salvation. God is pleased to work powerfully through the gospel in saving sinners. We read similar expressions of God's power in connection with the gospel. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For *the word of the cross* is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved *it is the power of God*.” God calls His chosen people to salvation by His power manifest in the proclamation of the gospel message. A little farther in the 1 Corinthians passage we read: “*We preach Christ crucified*, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ *the power of God* and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23). And then later still, Paul wrote to them these words:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you *the testimony of God* with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵*that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.* (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

Paul wrote of the power of God accompanying the gospel when he had proclaimed it in the city of Thessalonica. “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because *our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power* and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess. 1:4f).

God uses the preaching of the gospel to create new life in His people; this is a demonstration of mighty power. James wrote, “Of His (God's) own will He brought us forth *by the word of truth*, that we

might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:18). And then Peter also wrote of the power of God working through the gospel to cause sinners to be born again unto new life in Jesus Christ.

²²Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, ²³**having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,** ²⁴because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, ²⁵But the word of the LORD endures forever.” Now this is the word, which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Pet. 1:22-24)

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

Paul declared that the gospel is the power of God to everyone who **believes**. The one who believes is the one in whom the power of God is manifest. Now, we should know with certainty and conviction that the power of God for salvation is not in **faith**, but it is in the **gospel**. Many in evangelicalism today promote a teaching that God’s power resides in faith itself. Some heretics, those in the word-of-faith movement such as Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagan, teach that God Himself uses the power of faith to create and to work in His world. **The power is not in faith; the power is in the gospel that leads to and results in faith in the hearer.** We may see that this is the case in several places in the New Testament. Luke wrote in Acts of those who were assisted by the ministry of Apollos: “When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed” (Acts 18:27). God’s grace enabled them to belief. Also in Acts Luke described Lydia,

Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. **The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.** (Acts 16:14)

It was not her faith that resulted in her being changed; it was due to God opening her heart, that is, inclining her and enabling her to understand the message and to respond to the message of the gospel.

Now again, Paul declared that the gospel is the power of God to everyone who **believes**. The tense of the verb, “believes”, is significant. Paul did not write that the gospel is the power of God to everyone **who at one time believed the gospel in the past**. Many believe saving faith is only a single act of faith in a one-time decision to “accept Christ.” This is the emphasis that the error of **decisionism** has fostered on evangelicals for the last century and a half. People are told that if they but accept Jesus, and what is meant by that is a single act of faith, that this is saving faith. But everywhere in the New Testament **saving faith is the continuous act of believing that is presented and emphasized**. It is here. Paul wrote: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who **believes...**” This is a present tense verb that describes the ongoing faith, **the continual believing of a true believer**. Again, this is everywhere taught. Even in **John 3:16** we read:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that **whoever believes** (not “believed”) **in him** should not perish but have eternal life.”

And **John 3:17** and **18**:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who **believes in Him** is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

And **John 3:36**:

“He who *believes in the Son* has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

There are many professing Christians who are greatly troubled regarding their assurance of salvation because evangelists or pastors or books have pressured these people to recall whether or not they had truly “believed” rightly or truly years before, when they first heard the gospel. And especially those who believed at a young age are commonly unsettled because they doubt they had true or full or sufficient understanding of the gospel when they believed, and therefore they question if they had exercised saving faith. If I may be frank about this matter, it matters nothing what you believed 10 or 30 years ago, the promise of God is that “the power of God for salvation *to everyone who believes...*” The question you should ask yourself is this: “Do I believe the gospel today, even now?” “Am I believing the gospel today, does my life show forth my faith, does my speech and my attitudes and my values and my actions and my reactions demonstrate that I am believing the gospel?” If you are one who is believing, the power of God through the gospel is operative in you today. And to the degree that you live out today and tomorrow believing this gospel, you will see the power of God realized in your life to transform you into the child of God that God has destined for you to become.

5. “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.*”

God had bound Himself to bless the Jews first and foremost. He had promised that He would bless the Gentiles through them. Whenever Paul entered a city to begin to evangelize, his common practice was to begin his preaching ministry in the Jewish synagogues. But if and when they rejected Paul and his message, then Paul went to the Gentiles in that community with his message of the gospel.

Paul will expound upon this theme in Romans 9, 10, and 11.

We now arrive to the second verse of this introduction to the epistle. Verse 17 reads:

B. “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Rom. 1:17)

1. “For in it *the righteousness of God* is revealed...”

The initial word, “for”, as its use earlier so here, explains further what was stated in the previous verse. Paul had declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” “*For* in it the righteousness of God is revealed...” And so, verse 17 tells why the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation.

The expression, “the righteousness of God” is one of the most difficult to understand phrases in the Scriptures, and it is one that is debated greatly among Bible scholars.

Defining *δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ* (the righteousness of God) is crucial and intensely controversial. The secondary literature on this issue is so massive that only a full-length monograph (book) could tackle the issues adequately.²

We might first look at the verb associated with this subject. “For in it the righteousness of God *is revealed...*” “Is revealed” is the translation of *ἀποκαλύπτεται*, which is commonly translated in its noun form as “revelation” or the “apocalypse.” Paul is saying here that God is in the process of continuously revealing His righteousness in the gospel.³

² Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 63.

³ For you grammar sickies, this Greek verb is in the present tense, passive voice, and indicative mood. It is implying that God is the one who is continuously revealing His righteousness in the gospel. Commonly writers of Scripture will

But what does the expression, “the righteousness of God” mean? There are four different major opinions. *First*, most reformed scholars follow Martin Luther’s opinion that *this expression describes the gift of righteousness that comes from God and is given to believing sinners in the gospel*.⁴ In other words, Paul is describing the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer; it is the gift of righteousness through the believing sinner’s justification. The righteousness of God is a declaration of righteous standing before God that God Himself declares on behalf of a sinner upon his faith in the gospel. To be justified through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, means that God has declared a forensic (legal) status. Although the sinner is still a sinner and is worthy of death, God declares him, the believer, to be just, or righteous, before Him. God no longer regards the believing sinner as a guilty sinner, but a pardoned and righteous sinner.

Second, many are increasingly in number who understand “the righteousness of God” here in terms of *God’s saving power*.⁵ These scholars do not deny the idea of the above position, that God justifies, that is, declares sinners pardoned and righteous through faith alone, however, they believe that is not taught in this verse. They would argue that here God’s righteousness is an effective righteousness, God’s power that transforms people, not just declaring their legal status as changed by God. They would argue that Paul’s use of the word translated “is revealing” (ἀποκαλύπτεται) is an eschatological work of God (i.e. having to do with the end times), which has invaded history in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They would argue that for Paul, “it is more natural to speak of a divine action being revealed than it is to speak of a new status being revealed” (which is the first position). In addition, the wording that is found in **verse 17**, which reads, “*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith*”, is similarly found in **verse 18**, which reads, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...* (Rom. 1:18). Clearly in verse 18 God is revealing His active judgment in history; they argue that in verse 17 God is revealing His active saving power of His people.⁶ Moreover, just as verse 16 speaks clearly of the power of God in the gospel, and verse 17 is linked with the explanatory conjunction “for”, then it follows that verse 17 also speaks of God’s righteousness as a manifestation of God’s power.

A *third* position, which I think is the correct one, is that it would be inadequate to choose one of the above two positions to the exclusion of the other, but rather *it is best to understand Paul including both ideas-- God’s forensic declaration of righteousness and His righteousness to transform sinners-- in his expression, “the righteousness of God is revealed.”* I believe that this is the correct position:

I would suggest that it is a mistake to opt for an either-or here, and thus I conclude that the term “righteousness of God” is both forensic and transformative... Those whom God has vindicated He also changes... The saving righteousness of God is a gift received by faith alone, and God declares sinners to be right before Him on the basis of Christ’s atoning death. Yet God’s declaration of righteousness—which is a gift of the age to come invading the present evil age—is an effective declaration, so that those who are pronounced righteous are also transformed by God’s grace... The forensic is the basis for the transformative, but the one cannot be sundered from the other... God’s righteousness is both gift and power.⁷

The fourth understanding of the expression, “the righteousness of God”, is of recent invention. It has only been proposed in the last generation. It is the position of those who have embraced what has come to be

use a subject with a passive verb to imply God’s action, doing so in this manner to avoid too frequent direct references to the name of their holy God.

⁴ For sickies: This would make Θεοῦ (of God), a genitive of source: the righteousness that comes from God. Schreiner gives six points of scriptural evidence for this position, which he affirms, but he also sees an additional aspect of righteousness rather than imputed righteousness here only. See Thomas Schreiner, **Romans** (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 64.

⁵ Ibid, p. 63. For sickies: This would understand Θεοῦ (of God) as a subjective genitive: the righteousness which is God’s, being manifested in his powerfully saving people from their sin.

⁶ In this understanding, both uses of Θεοῦ (of God) in verses 17 and 18 would be the genitive of source, depicting God’s actions in history (Schreiner).

⁷ Schreiner, **Romans**, pp. 66-68.

called, “the new perspective on Paul.” I have a New Testament that was given to me by an educational mentor of mine, who first encouraged me and motivated me to attend seminary. He is with the Lord now. He wrote in the front cover these words,

“Lars: Congratulations on your earning the M. Div. On doctrine: Just remember, if it is historical it has a possibility of being true. If it is of recent origin, it is false without a doubt. God bless, Brother Harris, June 5, 1986.”

I think those are wise words. We will not go into detail about this New Perspective on Paul, but will do so at another time possibly. We only point out here is that *their understanding of this expression, “the righteousness of God” is that Paul was referring to God’s covenantal faithfulness.* God’s saving actions in the gospel reflect God being faithful to His covenantal commitments to His people.

The arguments in favor of defining God’s righteousness are not strong... God’s saving righteousness certainly involves His covenantal promises, but it should not be defined as His covenantal loyalty.⁸

2. “For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God *is revealed from faith for faith...*”

The interpretation of these words are many more in number and much more varied in kind than the previous expression that we considered. Here is a summary of some of the popular suggestions as to what Paul meant by these words:

Most interpretations include the idea of a progression from one form of faith to another: from the faith of the OT to the faith of the NT; from the faith of the law to the faith of the gospel; from the faith of the preachers to the faith of the hearers; from the faith of the present to the faith of the future; from the faith of the words we hear now to the faith that we will possess what the words promise; from the faithfulness of God to the faith of human beings; from smaller to greater faith; from faith as the ground to faith as the goal.⁹

Since this verse begins with the now familiar word, “for”, we understand that this is an explanation of verse 16. Since verse 16 spoke of the faith of human beings, this explanation of verse 16 also speaks of human faith. Probably what Paul was conveying is that through the gospel God manifests His power in order to produce and sustain faith in His people.

3. “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, *as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’*”

Here the apostle quotes the Old Testament Scriptures to substantiate his teaching. This is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4. It was providential that we made a study of this Old Testament prophet just before turning to this epistle of Romans. We will need to show how Paul viewed and used this verse from the prophecy of Habakkuk, but we will need to do next time.

⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

⁹ Ibid., p. 74.