

Romans 1:1-17 • How to Be Right with God

Introduction

Is it enough to “be saved”? How can we possibly know if we’re “right” with God? Fortunately, God has been speaking to this issue since Adam and Eve, and further expounds through Paul how we can know for sure that we’re right with Him.

¹Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name’s sake, ⁶among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

⁷to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Read v.1-7]

Q: How does Paul describe himself?

A: “...a bond-servant of Christ Jesus...” (employed forever as a servant), and as one “...set apart for the gospel...”

Q: To whom does he address the letter: What does the term mean?

A: To the “saints”. This word actually means “holy ones”, the essence of which means to be “set apart” for a specific purpose. It is the same word used by the Greek translators of the Hebrew Old Testament (Septuagint LXX) to describe the vessels and utensils used for sacrifice in the Tabernacle and Temple, items clean and pure and dedicated to God’s service.

Q: What are the 2 key words/concepts Paul uses repeatedly in these verses?

1. “called”
 - a. “...called as an apostle...” (v.1)
 - b. “...you also are the called of Jesus Christ...” (v.6)
 - c. “...called as saints...” (v.7)
2. “set apart”/“holiness”
 - a. “...set apart for the gospel of God...” (v.1)
 - b. “...according to the Spirit of holiness...” (v.4)

Q: What is an application for us in the use of these terms in regards to our own life?

A: God has a purpose for my life that involves both a personal call for the work of His kingdom and a general call to be holy—separated and distinct in heart and character—from the world, wholly devoted to His service, and His service **only**.

Q: In what verse does Paul address believers in Rome as “the sinners saved by grace”?

A: Nowhere. We are not called to continue in sin but to be pure and clean (holy) sin-free vessels dedicated to the work of the gospel in Christ.

Q: What does Paul identify in v.5 as the goal—the work, if you will—of the calling (“apostleship”) and grace received through Jesus Christ?

A: “...to bring about the obedience of faith...”

Point: Both the Greek and Hebrew word for “faith” is the same as “faithfulness”; they are interchangeable. This is a stark contrast to the common assertion, “I’m a sinner saved by grace”, in that although that may be true at the point of salvation when all past sins are forgiven (what we call “justification”), we are called to live from that point on in obedience and faithfulness. This is known as “sanctification”.

Application: Are there even the smallest areas of my life in which I believe I can continue to sin or be disobedient simply because I think I’m “covered” by God’s grace? How do you feel about a child that doesn’t change its behavior because he/she thinks they’ll be forgiven no matter what they do, no matter what the consequences?

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. ⁹For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹⁶For 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 to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

[Read v. 8-17]

Q: In v.8, for what reason does Paul give thanks to the Christians in Rome?

A: For their faith.

Application: Do we give one another (or our kids) enough appreciation for their faith? Does the lack of compliments/conversation regarding "faith" indicate to you something about the quality of your relationships? We might be "friendly" or even "loving", but do we use these as the barriers preventing deeper spiritual involvement?

Q: Focusing on v.16-17, why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel? Why does Paul use the word "ashamed" to begin with?

A: Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the manner through which people are saved. The word "ashamed" was used specifically by Jesus in Mark 8:38,

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

Publicly and unapologetically proclaiming Christ and His gospel is a visible indicator of those truly "called as saints"—set apart from this world as holy ones, dedicated vessels for His exclusive use.

Q: What is the relation between "who believes" in v.16 and "faith" in v.17?

A: It is the same word in Greek, "faith" being the noun form, "believe" the verb. To believe is to have faith, to have faith is to believe. Since "faith" and "faithfulness" are interchangeable, a clearer application for us is that proof of what we "believe" is evident by the degree of our faithfulness.

Q: Who does Paul quote from the Old Testament?

A: In v.17, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Q: Why did Habakkuk say these words? What was the context for his time?

A: Habakkuk struggled with the question of how God did things, first allowing Israel to decline so far, and second, allowing the really evil Assyrians to be used to punish Israel. God answered Habakkuk by saying, "...but the righteous man shall live by his faith." Coming directly from God, this means that living by faith (or faithfulness) in God is what constitutes righteousness. It's appropriate again in Paul's time to an emerging church living not just in the shadow of Rome, but one of its worst emperors in Nero.

Paul uses this verse to illustrate what it takes to be right with God and v.17 continues as the central theme throughout the Book of Romans.

Application: What does it mean—personally, daily—to live by faith? How does "living by faith" differ from being "saved by faith"?