

Bible Study: Letters of Paul
Central Presbyterian Church
November 16, 2025
Session 11/16: Romans “The Gospel’s Power”
Readings: Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-26
English text taken from the Lexham English Bible
Greek text taken from SBLGNT (Society of Biblical Literature Green New Testament)

ROMANS 1:16–17

Historical Setting:

Paul composes Romans from Corinth around AD 57 (cf. Acts 20:2–3), likely during his third missionary journey, as he plans to visit Rome en route to Spain (Rom 15:24–28). The letter addresses a house-church community in Rome, comprising Jewish Christians (expelled under Claudius in AD 49; Suetonius, Claud. 25.4; Acts 18:2) and Gentile converts. This period marks early Nero's rule (AD 54–68), when Christianity was viewed as a Jewish superstition (Tacitus, Ann. 15.44), and Paul's emphasis on the gospel counters rising anti-Jewish sentiments in the empire.

Verse 16:

SBLGNT

Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι.

Gloss:

Οὐ | γὰρ | ἐπαισχύνομαι | τὸ | εὐαγγέλιον,
Not | for | I-am-ashamed-of | the | gospel,
δύναμις | γὰρ | θεοῦ | ἐστὶν | εἰς | σωτηρίαν
power | for | of-God | it-is | unto | salvation
παντὶ | τῷ | πιστεύοντι, | Ἰουδαίῳ | τε | πρῶτον | καὶ | Ἑλληνι.
to-every | the | believing, | to-Jew | and | first | and | to-Greek.

LEB

“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.”

Exegesis

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *Crucifixion & Shame Culture*: Roman crucifixion symbolized utter degradation, often for non-citizens (Josephus, J.W. 5.449–51). Paul's unashamed stance challenges Stoic ideals of honour (Epictetus, Disc. 3.24.112) and Jewish messianic

expectations of a triumphant king (4Q252 from Qumran, envisioning a Davidic conqueror).

- *“Gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) as Imperial Term:* Echoes Augustus's Res Gestae (inscriptions proclaiming imperial "good news" of peace). In Rome, where emperor cults were prominent, Paul's gospel claims God's σωτηρία (salvation/rescue) trumps Caesar's pax Romana, subtly subversive amid loyalty oaths.
- *Jew First, Then Greek:* Aligns with Paul's synagogue-first evangelism (Acts 17:1–2). Culturally, it addresses Diaspora Jewish privileges (Philo, Legat. 155–57) while including Gentiles, countering Roman ethnic hierarchies (e.g., Juvenal's satires on "Greeks" as inferiors, Sat. 3.60–125).

Literary Context:

- *Thesis Statement of Romans:* Serves as the propositio in Hellenistic epistolary rhetoric.

Verse 17

SBLGNT:

δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται·
Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

Gloss:

δικαιοσύνη | γὰρ | θεοῦ | ἐν | αὐτῷ | ἀποκαλύπτεται
righteousness | for | of-God | in | it | is-being-revealed
ἐκ | πίστεως | εἰς | πίστιν, | καθὼς | γέγραπται·
out-of | faith | unto | faith, | just-as | it-has-been-written:
Ὁ | δὲ | δίκαιος | ἐκ | πίστεως | ζήσεται.
The | but | righteous-one | out-of | faith | will-live.

LEB:

“For the righteousness of God is revealed in it from faith to faith, just as it is written,
‘But the one who is righteous by faith will live.’”

Exegesis

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *Habakkuk 2:4 in Context:* From Babylonian crisis (~612–597 BC), emphasizing trust amid empire (Hab 1:5–11). Paul adapts it post-Temple destruction fears (pre-AD 70).
- *“Righteousness” in Jewish Thought:* Tsedaqah as God's vindication (Ps 98:2). Contrasts Rabbinic views (m. Sanh. 10:1, righteousness via deeds) and Hellenistic philosophy (Plato, Rep. 4.433a, justice as harmony).

- *Faith vs. Works Polemic*: Targets Judaizers (Gal 2:11–14), amid Roman synagogues' Torah emphasis (Josephus, Ant. 18.81–84). Culturally, *pistis* evokes Roman *fides* (loyalty pacts), redirecting it to God.

Literary Context:

- *Scripture as Proof*: Καθὼς γέγραπται anchors authority, common in midrashic style (cf. Rom 4).

ROMANS 3:21–26

Historical Setting:

Paul builds on universal sin (1:18–3:20), drawing from OT indictments. Rome's diverse population (slaves, freedmen, elites) mirrored the church's tensions, exacerbated by Claudius's edict returnees (AD 54), fostering debates on Jewish law.

Verse 21

SBLGNT:

Νυνὶ δὲ χωρὶς νόμου δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ πεφανέρωται, μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν,

Gloss:

Νυνὶ | δὲ | χωρὶς | νόμου | δικαιοσύνη | θεοῦ | πεφανέρωται,
Now | but | apart-from | law | righteousness | of-God | has-been-revealed,
μαρτυρουμένη | ὑπὸ | τοῦ | νόμου | καὶ | τῶν | προφητῶν,
being-testified | by | the | law | and | the | prophets,

LEB:

“But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified about by the law and the prophets—”

Exegesis:

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *“Now” (Nyni) as Eschatological Marker*: Echoes apocalyptic urgency (Dan 7:13–14; 4 Ezra 7:28–31). In AD 50s Rome, amid messianic hopes, Paul declares fulfillment.
- *Law & Prophets as Witness*: Culturally, this affirms Torah's value for Roman Jews (Philo, Mos. 2.43), while subverting nomistic piety (e.g., Bar 3:9–4:4 equates wisdom with law).

Literary Context:

- *Diatribic Style*: Shifts from accusation to gospel, like Greco-Roman oratory.
- *Inclusive Language*: “Law and prophets” = Tanakh shorthand, preparing Abraham midrash (Rom 4).

Verse 22

SBLGNT:

δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν διαστολή·

Gloss:

δικαιοσύνη | δὲ | θεοῦ | διὰ | πίστεως | Ἰησοῦ | Χριστοῦ
righteousness | but | of-God | through | faith | of-Jesus | Christ
εἰς | πάντας | τοὺς | πιστεύοντας. | οὐ | γὰρ | ἔστιν | διαστολή·
unto | all | the | believing. | not | for | there-is | distinction;

LEB:

“that is, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For there is no distinction,”

Exegesis:

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *“No Distinction” in Roman Society:* Challenges clientele system and ethnic divides. Echoes Stoic universalism but grounds it in Christ.
- *Faith in Jesus Christ:* Transfers pistis from emperor to Messiah, risky in Nero's court.

Literary Context:

- *Anaphora:* Repetition builds emphasis, like in Psalms.
- *Inclusive Universalism:* Links to 1:16's scope, forming inclusio.

Verse 23

SBLGNT:

πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ,

Gloss:

πάντες | γὰρ | ἥμαρτον | καὶ | ὑστεροῦνται | τῆς | δόξης | τοῦ | θεοῦ,
all | for | sinned | and | are-lacking | the | glory | of | God,

LEB:

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

Exegesis:

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *“Glory” (Δόξα) in Greco-Roman World:* Imperial doxa (e.g., Augustus's aureole). Jewish: Adam's lost radiance (3 Bar. 4:16; Life of Adam and Eve 20–21).
- *Jewish Adam Traditions:* Qumran (CD 3:20) and Philo link sin to glory loss, Paul universalizes.

Literary Context:

- *Psalm 14/53 Allusion*: Part of catena (3:10–18).
- *Tenses*: Aorist (fall) + present (state), narrative progression.

Verse 24

SBLGNT:

δικαιούμενοι δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ·

Gloss:

δικαιούμενοι | δωρεὰν | τῇ | αὐτοῦ | χάριτι
being-justified | freely | by-the | his | grace
διὰ | τῆς | ἀπολυτρώσεως | τῆς | ἐν | Χριστῷ | Ἰησοῦ·
through | the | redemption | the-(one) | in | Christ | Jesus;

LEB:

“being justified as a gift by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,”

Exegesis:

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *Ἀπολύτρωσις* = *Slave Market Term*: Common in manumission papyri. Echoes Jewish exodus redemption (Hos 13:14 LXX).
- *Grace (Χάρις)* vs. *Roman Patronage*: Unlike reciprocal charis (Seneca), Paul's is sovereign.

Literary Context:

- *Juridical Language*: Courtroom metaphor.
- *Redemption Motif*: Ties to Old Testament liberation themes.

Verse 25

SBLGNT:

ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων

Gloss:

ὃν | προέθετο | ὁ | θεὸς | ἱλαστήριον
whom | set-forth | the | God |(as)-propitiation
διὰ | [τῆς] | πίστεως | ἐν | τῷ | αὐτοῦ | αἵματι
through | [the] | faith | in | the | his | blood
εἰς | ἔνδειξιν | τῆς | δικαιοσύνης | αὐτοῦ
unto | demonstration | of-the | righteousness | of-him
διὰ | τὴν | πάρεσιν | τῶν | προγεγονότων | ἁμαρτημάτων
because-of | the | passing-over | the | having-previously-occurred | sins

LEB:

“whom God made publicly available as the mercy seat through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness, because of the passing over of previously committed sins,”

Exegesis:

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *Ἰλαστήριον* = *Yom Kippur*: Temple rituals central to Jewish identity; Paul sees Christ as antitype post-exile.
- *Public Display*: Like Roman spectacles (crucifixions public). Blood: Merges Jewish sacrifice (Lev 17) with pagan appeasement (Virgil, Aen. 2.720).

Literary Context:

- *Atonement Typology*: Combines exodus and atonement.
- *Divine Passive*: Emphasizes God's initiative.

Verse 26

SBLGNT:

ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ, πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ.

Gloss:

ἐν | τῇ | ἀνοχῇ | τοῦ | θεοῦ,
in | the | forbearance | of | God,
πρὸς | τὴν | ἔνδειξιν | τῆς | δικαιοσύνης | αὐτοῦ
unto | the | demonstration | of-the | righteousness | of-him
ἐν | τῷ | νῦν | καιρῷ,
in | the | present | time,
εἰς | τὸ | εἶναι | αὐτὸν | δίκαιον
unto | the | to-be | him | just
καὶ | δικαιοῦντα | τὸν | ἐκ | πίστεως | Ἰησοῦ.
and | justifying | the-(one) | out-of | faith | of-Jesus.

LEB:

“in the forbearance of God, for the demonstration of his righteousness in the present time, so that he should be just and the one who justifies the person by faith in Jesus.”

Exegesis:

Historical & Cultural Context:

- *God's Forbearance*: Similar to Hellenistic Jewish patience motifs (2 Macc 6:14). Roman clementia coins (Nero's era) paralleled.
- *“Present Time”*: Kairos as opportune moment (Aristotle, Rh. 1.3), now eschatological.

Literary Context:

- *Climax*: Resolves wrath-righteousness tension.
- *Purpose Clause*: Teleological, like OT covenants.

SYNTHESIS

Redemptive-Historical Arc: In 1st-century Rome, Paul's gospel confronts imperial doxa and Jewish nomism, revealing God's righteousness through Christ's cross—eschatologically now, culturally subversive, literarily structured as fulfillment for all.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is the gospel “the power of God”?
 - How does justification by faith unite Jews and Gentiles?
 - How does this theology shape our view of salvation?
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