

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 1, Verses 8-17**  
**Notes from Tuesday July 20, 2010**  
**Last Revised on July 24, 2010**

**Songs**

**Opening Prayer**

Dear God,

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Thank you for this opportunity you have given to gather together and study your word.

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As always, Lord, we ask you to watch over this gathering and each one here,

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to protect us from evil, and from misunderstanding, and guide us into your truth.

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We want to hear and understand clearly the words of your apostle Paul,

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written to your people in Rome all those years ago,

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about your gospel, O God, the gospel concerning your son.

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We need to hear those words too...words that help us to understand your gospel,

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Of how you sent your son Jesus to save us, by taking away our sin,

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This Paul says...your Gospel,... is your power... for salvation to everyone who believes.

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He was not ashamed to proclaim it, Lord, and we don't want to be ashamed either.

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We want to understand the gospel better and proclaim it proudly and fearlessly.

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Not just in church, but to our families, in school, at work and everywhere we go in the world..

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Please forgive us Lord for being so slow, so shy, so ashamed to share your gospel with the world.

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Please help us Lord, to do better, by what we read this evening.

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In Jesus Name we pray,

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Amen.

## Introduction

Two weeks ago we began a new study of The Letter of Paul to the Romans.

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At that time, I explained how this class is conducted and some things about the Bible and Bible study generally.

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If you were not here then, please consult the notes from that class which have been posted to the web site that we maintain for this class.

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Last week we began our detailed study of The Letter of Paul to the Romans.

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We read and discussed the first seven verses of Chapter 1. (Please look there.)

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Together these seven verses comprise the fairly ordinary if a bit long prescript,

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to a fairly ordinary if a bit long letter of that period.

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As usual the prescript begins with the name and description of the author, who in this case is the Apostle Paul.

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This occupies the first six verses of Chapter 1 which, as has been said, is an unusually long description of the author.

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We discussed various reasons for why this section of the letter is so long and the possible significance of that for our understanding of the letter.

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If I may suggest, the most important thing to remember is that Paul is elevating Christ and the gospel and describing himself as one whose significance is derivative --- i.e. he is a servant and representative of Christ and a spokesman for the gospel and nothing more, or less, than that.

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His God-given mission is to all who are Christians, and all who are Christian must receive him and heed the message that he speaks on God's behalf.

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The next part of the prescript is the identity of the recipients of the letter, who in this case are "all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints." That is the first part of verse 7.

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The standard prescript ends with a short greeting, which is here very Christian: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That is the second part of verse 7 and the last of what we covered last week.

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Last week someone asked me what is the Greek word here translated "peace" and I drew a blank.

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The next day somebody else sent me the answer by email which I have double checked and report to you all now as promised.

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The Greek word translated peace is εἰρήνη (pronounced ih-ray-nay with emphasis on the second syllable).

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There were several other important points which we brought out in our discussion of the first seven verses, but I think I will leave it to you to review the notes which have been posted to the web site.

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Several people have suggested that I come up with a way of posting a shorter summary of what we cover each week, rather than posting my class notes verbatim, which are too long for most people to read through quickly. I am thinking about how to do that and hope to come up with something.

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Before we read on, are there any questions or comments regarding the first seven verses of Chapter 1, or anything else that we have discussed so far?

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OK, then. Let's move on.

### **The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 8-15**

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 8-15, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read it in English.

**8First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.**

**9For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you**

**10always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.**

**11For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you---**

**12that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.**

**13I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.**

**14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.**

**15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**

Thank you.

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As we have discussed, the first seven verses of Chapter 1 follow the standard format for the prescript of a letter written in those days.

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It was also common in those days for the prescript to be followed by some religious statement.

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Typically among non-Christians this would have been a prayer to the gods for the health and long life or some other benefit of the recipient.

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What we have just read, in verses 8-15 of Romans Chapter 1, may correspond to that part of a typical Greek letter.

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The content is, of course, very different than anything that might have been written by or to a non-Christian,

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which stands to reason, it having been very clearly established in verses 1-7 that this is a letter written only to Christians by one who is an authorized representative of Christ!

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...But why has this authorized representative of Christ never before visited them or, so far as we know, written to them?

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And now suddenly here is this gigantic letter --- what's up with that?

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Why should they take this letter or Paul seriously?

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Paul has already told them in verses 1-7 why they must take him seriously, because he is an apostle, but this still does not explain why he has neglected them until now.

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Verses 8-15 anticipate and answer this question.

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Basically in verses 8-15, Paul is saying that it is only because God has been keeping him busy elsewhere, and not because of any lack of desire on his part, that Paul has not yet been able to visit them and preach the gospel to them in person, something that he has been and still is eager to do.

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But let's look at these verses carefully and in detail.

**(Verse 8)**

**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.**

Paul begins with the word “**first**”

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It is possible that this means that what he will say next is of first importance

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Or he means something like “let me begin by saying ....”

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But it is most likely that he started to enumerate several points but then forgot that he was doing that...

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This is something that he seems to do elsewhere, in other letters he wrote, and it is not very important, I suppose, except to let you know that if you are looking for a “second” or a “third” point in this sequence, you will not find them.

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What Paul does, “first,” in this section is to acknowledge their faith.

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This is not something he knows about through a secret or mysterious source, so far as we know.

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Rather it is common knowledge “throughout the world” that there are Christians in Rome.

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He does not mean to say, I think, that the Christians in Rome are famous for being especially good Christians, only that they are known to be there.

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Paul says that he is thankful, not for some, but for all of these Christian believers in Rome.

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We are to notice that he expresses his thankfulness not to the Christians in Rome, themselves.

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Q. Why is this?

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A. Because nobody makes himself a Christian, only God can do that. So he thanks God.

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It is interesting that he thanks God through Jesus Christ.

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Q. Why does he do that?

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A. Christ is the only mediator between man and God. There is no way to get to God except through Jesus.

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And it is interesting that Paul refers to God as “my God.”

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Q. Why do you suppose he does that? Any ideas?

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This is an expression that Paul rarely uses but which we hear somewhat frequently in the

Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, in the mouth of men who are experiencing their relationship with God as being intensely personal.

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Having read such passages (including this one) in the Bible, I have occasionally been inclined to say the same sort of thing myself --- haven't you?

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"I thank my God that he has...done this mighty thing ...for you."

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Or "I will ask my God to help you ... with this difficult problem ... or in this tough situation."

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In any case Paul can not mean to say that God is any more "his" god than he is "their" God.

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I think this is just an expression of personal piety, such as we sometimes feel, or read about in the Old Testament.

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Q. But finally I need to ask a harder question: why exactly is Paul thankful that God has put Christians in Rome?

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Q. Are we thankful when we come to know that God has put Christians in, say, Baghdad or Beijing or Tokyo or North Korea or someplace else where one might not expect to find many Christians?

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Q. Even when we ourselves have done nothing to contribute to their presence, just as Paul has not yet been able to contribute much to the proclamation of the Gospel in Rome?

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A. I am so ashamed to say that I rarely feel or express thanksgiving to God when I hear of the progress of the gospel in places where I have never been or supported in any way.

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I think I know why **I** don't and why Paul **did** experience such thanksgiving.

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Consider Verse 9 and the first part of verse 10, which read

**(Verse 9, and 10a)**

**For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers,**

Paul is thankful for what God has done in Rome, because Paul has been asking God to make it happen!

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He has had these people constantly in his prayers!

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This is one part of Paul's service to the Lord which is purely inward, purely spiritual.

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Even when he cannot go someplace and proclaim the gospel, and establish a church, and stay to teach and to pastor he can pray always and without ceasing that the gospel will be

proclaimed and will bear fruit in that place.

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And so have been his prayers for Rome, and so he is naturally thankful when he hears news about the existence of Christians in Rome! Look how God has answered his prayers!

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Q. And where have those prayers come from? What has moved Paul to pray for Rome?

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A. Where all true prayer comes from: God, the Holy Spirit, has moved Paul to say such prayers.

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Q. But how can the Christians in Rome know that what Paul is saying is true? Maybe this is just *tatamai*

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Q. How do they know that he has really held them in prayer and served them and God in that way, even though other things have preventing him from visiting and writing?

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A. There can be no outward proof. Only God knows. That is why Paul calls God as his witness.

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This, calling God in witness to the truth of what he is saying, is something that Paul does fairly often.

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By this the Romans will understand that Paul is not just “being polite” when he claims to have been carrying them constantly in prayer. He is making a very serious claim.

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But you know, there are people who just sit around and pray when they should be taking action too.

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Is Paul one of these?

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How did his praying stop him from coming to Rome? What kind of excuse is that?!

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The latter part of verse 10 reads

**(Verse 10b)**

**asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.**

One of the things (but far from the only one I think) contained in Paul’s constant prayers to his God, was the request that God would let him come to Rome.

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That Paul had long desired to come to Rome and perhaps even made the attempt, seems clear from the wording of verse 10.

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But so far, such a visit has not been within the scope of God’s will.

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In other words it has been Paul's constant desire to get to Rome, one which I dare say God put in his heart, but one which God had so far continually prevented Paul from realizing.

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Q. But if such a trip has been so clearly opposed by the will of God, then why does Paul still wish to go there?

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A. Paul does not know the particular will of God before the fact!

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There are, of course, some rare exceptions about which we read in Acts and the Pauline Epistles... times when Paul received a special revelation from Christ...but these are rare so far as we know from what is written.

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Normally Paul makes his plans in the usual way...using his head and his heart and trusting to God's goodness and just forging ahead.

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Often he finds his plans frustrated, as in the case of his long standing desire to come to Rome.

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So far God hasn't allowed it, and has kept Paul busy doing other things, but that in itself does not mean that Paul's desire to visit Rome is inappropriate, or that he should abandon all hope of coming to them.

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On the contrary, it is important that the Christians in Rome be made aware of Paul's deep concern for them, including his constant prayers, and his long frustrated efforts to visit. Then they will read and understand this letter in the right way.

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Q. So, why does Paul wish to visit them?

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A. There are two reasons: for their benefit and for his own!

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A. Or perhaps we should say as Paul does, that he believes that such a visit would be mutually beneficial.

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Let's see each side of the benefit in turn.

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First, Verse 11 reads:

**(Verse 11)**

**For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you---**

OK, then, one of the reasons that Paul longs to see them, is for their benefit.

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He has no money or material possessions to distribute to them.

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His gifts he says are spiritual.

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And would strengthen them, spiritually.

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Q. What sort of gifts does he have in mind?

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A. Preaching, Teaching, Prophecy, and other such gifts which God has given to Paul for the benefit of the Church.

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God has equipped Paul uniquely, as indeed we are all uniquely equipped, to serve others within the body of Christ.

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What Paul does generally is exercise these gifts throughout the Church as God gives him the opportunity, and he longs for an opportunity to impart some of these blessings to the folks in Rome.

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But Paul knows and has himself clearly taught the church in Corinth that all who are in Christ have an important place and certain gifts, so it would be wrong to suppose that, were he to visit Rome, they would be the only beneficiaries. He would benefit too.

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Verse 12 reads

**(Verse 12)**

**that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.**

They are Christians, too!

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The Holy Spirit dwells in them.

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To spend time together, the Christians in Rome and the Apostle Paul, would be a time of joy and encouragement and edification for one and all.

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Maybe Paul, the Apostle, has more to impart to the Romans by way of preaching and teaching and admonition than have they to impart to him, but only because it is Paul who God is using in that way.

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But the kingdom of God is strange in this way: the strong and the weak truly do benefit one another and even learn from one another. Paul understands this. He really wants to see them! He really expects for benefits to flow in both directions.

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Verse 13 reads

**(Verse 13)**

**I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.**

It should already be clear to those who have been reading the letter carefully to this point,

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how much Paul has always wanted to visit Rome and how often he has intended to come,

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but that his other responsibilities, and various difficulties, have prevented him from doing so.

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He now states this even more plainly, calling them brothers. This is a “family letter.”

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His reason for wishing to visit them, he says here, is to reap some harvest among them.

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This may possibly mean that he wants something from them, such as their support for poor Christians in Jerusalem or his proposed mission to Spain.

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But I don't think that is what he has in mind here.

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He has already made it plain that, while the benefits go both ways, his first thought in coming to them is that he would be able to impart some spiritual gift to them, to strengthen them spiritually.

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So I think the harvest he has mainly in mind, is one that would strengthen the Church of God in Rome.

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He has already reaped a large harvest among Christians throughout the Gentile lands, as those in Rome must surely know. Paul hopes to accomplish the same good things among them.

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Paul's responsibility to proclaim the gospel is universal, as we now read in verse 14

#### **(Verse 14)**

**I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.**

People try to dissect this statement which may be, in my opinion, just a way to say that Paul's responsibility to proclaim the gospel is universal.

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In those days, it was common enough to divide the whole world into two groups: Greeks and Barbarians.

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This would sometimes have been a linguistic distinction: those who spoke Greek and those who did not.

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It would also have been a cultural distinction: those who were thought to be civilized and those who were not.

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And it might have corresponded with the second distinction, that is between those who were

thought to wise and those who were thought to be foolish.

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There was not, of course, a real correspondence between the Greeks and the Wise, any more than there was a correspondence between the Barbarian and the foolish, and Paul certainly knew that.

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There were very many wise barbarians and foolish Greeks in those days.

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And it is not easy to know how Hellenistic and Palestinian Jews would have been spread across these categories, if at all..

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But again, personally I think Paul means here to say that where the preaching of the gospel is concerned, there is no human basis for excluding anyone.

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I think he is basically just building to the point in the following verse 15, which reads

**(Verse 15)**

**So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**

Paul is eager to preach the gospel everywhere because that is what God called him to do.

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And Rome is no exception.

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Any questions or comments?

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Let's read on.

### **The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 16 and 17**

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 16 and 17, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read it in English.

**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 for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."**

Now, I said before that verses 1-7 corresponded to the prescript of a standard letter of that era, where we learn who is writing to whom. In this case Paul, an Apostle of Christ, is writing to all of the Christians in Rome. This is a Christian communication, not one addressed outside the church.

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Next we read verses 8-15 which corresponded to the prayer or blessing that often followed the prescript in a standard letter of that time. Here we see that Paul has been constantly in

prayer for the brothers in Rome. And he is anxious to come to see them also and preach the gospel among them, just as he has done elsewhere, with good effect.

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It is easy to see how the Christians in Rome might have felt slighted by Paul, who had by then traveled extensively throughout the Roman empire but had never before visited them in Rome. And we can understand why Paul might have needed to explain the situation in that regard, as he has done in the first 15 verses that we have read.

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Q. But why might Paul be ashamed of the gospel? What a strange thing to say!

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A. Paul of course is **not** ashamed of the gospel, as we just read in the first part of verse 16, where he said

**(Verse 16a)**

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel,**

But why would he even need to say this, particularly to a group of Christians?

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This could possibly be just a figure of speech, another way of saying “I am proud of the gospel.”

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In that case, combining verse 15 and the first part of verse 16 would give us something like this: **“I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome, because I am proud of the gospel.”**

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This would make sense within this context.

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It would reinforce the point he had been making about really wanting to come to them and it would lead into what follows, in most of the rest of this letter, which is an exaltation and explanation of the gospel.

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But probably Paul has chosen to say “I am not ashamed” rather than “I am proud” for a reason.

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This may be because some supposed that he **was** ashamed of the gospel, or at least ashamed to preach the gospel in Rome, in which case emphasis is on the word “not.”

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“I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome, because I am **NOT** ashamed of the gospel.”

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It is **NOT** shame that has kept me away from Rome

---

Or maybe there were others who were ashamed of preaching the gospel in Rome and Paul wishes to emphasize that he is not one of these, in which case the emphasis is on the word “I”

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For **I** am not ashamed of the gospel.

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There may even be a hint here that the brothers in Rome to whom Paul is writing are the ones who are ashamed. Perhaps they are “laying low” and “keeping quiet.”

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In any case I think we are supposed to recognize that the gospel is something of which Christians in those days often were ashamed,

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and probably not just in Rome but almost everywhere that Paul traveled,

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which would explain why Paul’s arrival in town very often precipitate a riot of some sort.

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I think you will agree that this was not just a problem among Christians in those days,

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but in our day as well.

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When Paul speaks of not being ashamed of the gospel, I think what he means primarily is that he is not reluctant to proclaim it anywhere but, rather, is anxious to proclaim the gospel everywhere.

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This is where we fall down, isn’t it? You and I?

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I know that I do.

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I truly believe the gospel. I can even stand up and lead a Bible study in church. But I am reluctant to share this same gospel with coworkers in my office, or in a public place with people I do not know, or even with members of my family who may not yet believe.

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Q. Why is that? Why am I reluctant to proclaim the gospel? Why are you?

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A. Partly this may arise from the fear of man, as Pastor Takeshi preached a couple of weeks ago, in connection with Paul’s letter to the Galatians. We don’t want to offend others or be rejected by them. Or ridiculed.

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A. But I think this is also because you and I, and other Christians, including those in Paul’s day, have failed to fully appreciate the power of the gospel.

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The second part of verse 16 reads:

**(Verse 16b)**

**for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

The gospel in our head or even in our heart or even in our actions does not save other people.

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What saves others is the gospel we proclaim and which, by God's grace, is received by faith.

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It is the words we speak about the salvation available in Christ, which God uses to save people from eternal death and destruction, and therefore conversely, to give them blessed eternal life in the Kingdom of his Son.

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These words, the gospel proclaimed, are the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

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God has ordained this way, and only this way, for the salvation of mankind from destruction.

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Once we understand this, we should not be ashamed of the gospel, or shy about proclaiming it.

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At the same time, we should understand that this is not "our power" but "God's power" for salvation.

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And we should understand that this power is effective only in those who believe;

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Which no man can determine.

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It is by God's grace that people believe the gospel and are saved.

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But there is no tribe or nation of people who are excluded.

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As we previously discussed in connection with verses 2-4, the gospel of God is this good news concerning God's son, who was born a man from the house of David, declared to be the son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.

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These things happen in fulfillment of ancient promises first made to the Jews, but through the Jews, this gospel has now also come to save all of who believe, both Jew and Gentile, without distinction.

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Here in verse 16b, Paul uses the word Greek as a synonym for Gentile --- i.e. all who are not Jewish.

Verse 17 continues

**(Verse 17)**

**For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."**

This is an important verse which, combined with the last half of verse 16, marks the transition between the introductory material and the main body of this letter.

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This verse and a half (i.e. 6b, 7) also sort of announce the theme of the letter, which is "the

gospel.”

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They do so in a very brief way, and this makes it a little difficult to do justice to this verse and a half, before having read and digested the whole letter.

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So please be patient, if verses 16b and 17 do not come clear to you all of a sudden.

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For starters we are given the thought that something called the “righteousness of God” is revealed in the gospel.

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Probably this means the righteousness which comes from God,

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that is the righteousness which God attributes to those who believe in his son Jesus,

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and because of what Jesus has accomplished on the cross for all who believe.

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I must tell you that there are very many other possible ways to understand the term “righteousness of God,” but I think what I have suggested is close to what Paul had in mind here, and is generally consistent with Paul’s teaching as it unfolds in the remainder of this letter.

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Verse 17 continues by saying that this righteousness is revealed “from faith for faith”

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This a tough one for the translators, but I think it means that when we put our trust in Christ and what he has accomplished for us, we apprehend the righteousness which God attributes to us for Jesus sake, and understand that we are truly saved and this, in turn, increases our faith the more.

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It is our faith in Christ, in other words, through which our righteousness before God is revealed, assuring us of our salvation and enabling us to remain faithful to the God who saves us.

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There is some debate, mostly between protestants and Roman Catholics, regarding whether this righteousness which God attributes to us for Jesus sake, is merely attributed, or whether there is some real improvement in our nature.

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But I am honestly not sure whether there is a real disagreement here.

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It is certainly best to understand that our salvation is by grace through faith alone --- which may be the best way to understand “from faith to faith” in verse 17.

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But we also know that true saving faith is accompanied by the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit and a process of sanctification which manifests real improvement in the life of the believer.

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Paul confirms all of this with a quote from Habakkuk: “The righteous shall live by faith.”

(ESV)

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This is a loose quotation or paraphrase from the Old Testament prophet, who said that by trusting in God's faithfulness, by putting their faith in him, God's people would finally be saved.

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This is what Paul also means: that it is by faith alone that God's people are saved...are deemed righteous before God, and preserved unto eternal life.

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A better translation, I think, than what we have in the ESV (which I have taken from Cranfield) is "the righteous by faith shall live."

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It is by faith in Christ that we are considered righteous before God and therefore live and enjoy every blessing.

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That ends my prepared remarks for today.

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Are there any questions?

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord God,

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Thank you for being a God who speaks to us.

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Help us to hear your voice and to understand it and to obey it.

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Especially help us to know your son Jesus, and to understand what he accomplished on our behalf

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And help us to be bold in sharing what we know and understand about Jesus with others

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When we share this good news, Lord, please cause it to be met by faith in those who hear it.

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We understand, O God, that only you can save us from sin,

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And that the way you do that, is through the work of Christ on the cross.

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And the faith that comes from hearing this gospel proclaimed.

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Thank you God for letting us share in this process.

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Please help us not to be ashamed of the gospel,

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which is your power to save,

---



and your righteousness revealed.

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In Jesus Name we pray.

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Amen