

While 1:16,17 are usually regarded as the summary of the entire letter to the Romans, we can't ignore the first word in verse 16: “For.” This connects 1:16 with what came before. We should be careful not to separate this verse from its context!

Paul, “set apart for the gospel of God” (1:1) and desirous to “preach the gospel to [those] who are in Rome” (1:15), now begins to reveal the importance of the gospel. It is the greatest power in the universe, because it is the power of God to remedy the greatest problem and provide for the greatest need in the human life. Our greatest problem is that we are sinners before the holy God Who created us. Our greatest need is to have the sin-barrier removed between us and God so that we can do what we were made to do: glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

1:16 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.

Enduring All for the Gospel – a Testimony of Treasure Ashamed

- When this verb is similarly used in the New Testament, it speaks of enduring suffering for the sake of something/someone greater:
 - “And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 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” (Mark 8:34-38).

- “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God...for this reason I also suffer these things, but **I am not ashamed**” (2 Timothy 1:8,12).

Treasure

- When Paul tells us that the gospel does not shame him, he is telling us that he is willing to suffer for it. This is a statement of value. He values the gospel above fitting in with society, comfort, prosperity, safety. The gospel is a treasure more valuable than all these things.

This Is the Power of God

- Really take time to think about this. We look at the world around us and see a seemingly endless list of wrongs that need to be righted. By what means can the power of God be brought to bear on such a world? We are greatly tempted to use the very means the world uses, the very powers, the very systems and structures and rules. But Paul gives us a simple, radically counter-cultural, key to the very power of the Almighty God: the proclamation of the Gospel.¹
- Paul will echo himself in 1 Corinthians on this subject:
READ 1 Corinthians 1:18,22-24.²

¹ “Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, XV).

² Just as Paul has been speaking of God’s calling several times so far in Romans (1:1,6,7), he does the same in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians (1:1,2,24), as well.

- The proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ seems so powerless and worthless to the world, but it is the means by which God exercises power in this world! Faith in this scriptural truth is the antidote to the temptation to seek power through the same means the world does!

Salvation

- From what does *“the power of God”* save us? God’s wrath against our sin in judgment:
READ Romans 5:8-10.³

All Who Are Believing

- The phrase *“everyone who believes”* needs clarification. *“Believes”* is a present active participle – the important word being “present.” We could also translate this phrase as “all the ones who are believing.” Young’s Literal Translation (1898) renders it “everyone who is believing.”
- There’s no such thing as a past-tense saving faith. Those who will be saved from God’s wrath against their sin at the judgment are those who continuously believed from conversion/rebirth until physical death.
- Here’s a good study for you: look up all the places where the verb “believe” is found as a present active participle in the New Testament. In other words, where else does the N.T. speak of “those who are right now, continuously believing”? READ Mark 9:23; John 3:15,16,18,36; 5:24; 6:35,40,47; 7:38; 11:25,26; 12:44,36; 14:12; Acts 10:43; 13:39; Romans 4:5; 9:33; 10:4,11; 1 Peter 2:6; 1 John 5:1,5,10.

Old Testament to New Testament

Paul’s Surprise

- Paul surprises us now – after speaking of the saving benefits of the gospel to *“everyone”* who is believing,

³ Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 3:15; 5:5; 15:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9; 1 Timothy 2:15; 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:10; 4:18.

he now says, *“to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* What does this mean? This is a statement of God’s Gospel plan worked out in history, not a statement of God’s unqualified preference for the Jewish people.

What Paul Is Saying: Historical Order

- Paul is reminding us of God’s long working through human history. After the promise of the serpent-crushing Seed of the woman (Jesus) was made in Genesis 3:15, God worked through a specific line of humanity to bring that promise to fruition. Let’s look at a few reminders.

A Jew-First Gospel Preached by Noah

- Noah prophesies of this Gospel: *“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem...may God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem”* (Genesis 9:26,27).
- *“Shem”* is the forefather of the Jewish people.⁴ *“Japheth”* is the forefather of the Gentiles/Greeks/non-Jews. God worked through the Semites (the Jews), and through the Gospel of Jesus Christ (the goal of the Semite/Jewish line) brought Japhethites (non-Jews) into the community of the Lord’s covenant people, the Semites. *“The Jew first [the Old Testament] and also to the Greek [the New Testament].”*

A Jew-First Gospel Preached by Abraham

- Fast-forward to Abraham. God makes this promise to him: *“...I will make you a great nation...in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”* (Genesis 12:2,3). Galatians 3:7-9 calls this promise “the Gospel.” God’s promise to Abraham, father of the Jews, was fulfilled in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by which all the promises

⁴ That’s why we call things pertaining to the Jews “Semitic,” from their ancestor Shem.

of the Old Testament made to the Jews are fulfilled by Jesus the Jew, Who brings Greeks (non-Jews) into these promises by faith.

- Look at these parallels between Genesis 12:3 and Romans 1:16:
 - *“I will make you a great nation” = “The Jew first”*
 - *“In you all the families of the earth will be blessed” = “And also to the Greek”*

A Jew-First Gospel in Jesus’ Earthly Ministry

- In Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Gospel was to be preached to the Jews first since it was a fulfillment of God’s promises to them in the Old Testament:
 - *“These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: ‘Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 10:5,6).*
 - *“...salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). Jesus says this to the Samaritan woman – He is the salvation which has come out from the Jewish people.⁵*
 - *“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would*

*be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, **beginning from Jerusalem**” (Luke 24:44-47).*

- The apostle Peter speaks of *“the word which [God] sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)” (Acts 10:36).*

The Historical Precedent Described by Paul

- Twice in Romans the apostle Paul reminds us that the Jews had a long history with God in which He had blessed them above all other people-groups:
 - *“...what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1,2). The Jews were given the Old Testament. God spoke to no other people about Himself, what He required of humanity, and the promises of a salvation He would give.⁶*
 - *“...Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh” (Romans 9:4,5). Notice that Paul’s list of the Old Testament benefits climax in the New Testament benefit: the coming of Christ, which fulfills all that came before.*

⁵ Compare with Matthew 15:21-28//Mark 7:24-30.

⁶ Remember this, though: they cannot understand those *“oracles of God”* apart from faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:14-16).

What Paul Is Not Saying: Ethnic Preference?

- Paul is not saying that the Jewish people as a whole had/have a special relationship with God apart from the salvation that comes by faith in Jesus Christ.
 - There are not two ways of salvation. Paul tells us in Romans 10:1-4 he is praying for the Jews’ salvation. Despite their “zeal for God,” they are lost apart from faith in Jesus, Who is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.
 - There are not two peoples of God (Israel and the Church). Ephesians 2:11-22 clearly, unequivocally states the unity of Jews and non-Jews in Christ.⁷
- Ethnic barriers are demolished in Christ, including the one that historically divided Jew and non-Jew:

⁷ The Church does not replace Israel. The true Israel and the Church are one. In the Gospel, non-Jews are added to the believing Jews of the true Israel in Christ (only believing Jews are truly the Israel of God). Look at how Paul describes non-Jews before Christ to the state of non-Jews when they come to Christ by faith:

Non-Jews Before Christ	Non-Jews in Christ by Faith
<i>"...excluded from the commonwealth of Israel..." (2:12)</i>	<i>"...no longer strangers and aliens, but...fellow citizens with the saints" (2:19).</i>
<i>"...strangers to the covenants of promise" (2:12)</i>	<i>"...having been built on the foundation of the apostles [New Testament] and prophets [Old Testament]..." (2:20).</i>
<i>"...having no hope and without God in the world" (2:12).</i>	<i>"...you are...of God's household..." (2:19).</i>
<i>"...formerly were far off" (2:13)</i>	<i>"...have been brought near..." (2:13)</i>

- *“There is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28,29).*
- *“...there is no distinction between Greek and Jew...but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:11).*
- In the Old Testament, God worked and spoke through the Jewish people to bring His Son into the world to bless the non-Jews. Now that His Son has come (as revealed in the New Testament), believing Jews and non-Jews are made one in Christ. God does not play favorites based on race or nationality. He loves and blesses those who are united to His Son by faith.

What’s At Stake?

- Paul makes this point in 1:16 not to highlight how important the Jewish people are to God. What’s at stake is God’s truthfulness in the Old Testament. He made a lot of promises in the Old Testament. Does the New Testament mean God isn’t going to keep the Old Testament promises? How can this be true if God is a promise-keeper?
- The shocking scandal of the gospel to that first generation was that the Old Testament promises were fulfilled by God in Jesus Christ not just for Jews, but for non-Jews, as well!

Paul treasures the Gospel above all – including comfort and security – because He knows it alone can save us from our biggest threat: the right wrath of God against our sin. Whoever you are, the Gospel alone solves this biggest threat and restores us to peace and eternal blissful life with our Creator.