C. Summary Statement of the Letter’s Theme (1:16–17)

Bibliography


**Translation**

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, since it is the power of God for salvation, to all who believe, Jew first but also Gentile. 17 For the righteousness of God is being revealed in it from faith to faith—as it is written, “He who is righteous by faith shall live.”

**Notes**

a. The omission of πρῶτον (first) by some witnesses, including B G and the Sahidic version, may be due to Marcion, for whom the idea of Jewish priority would have been unacceptable (Metzger).

**Form and Structure**

Vv 16–17 is clearly the thematic statement for the entire letter. As such it is the climax of the introduction; note the deliberate buildup in the talk of εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγελίζεσθαι (vv 1, 9, 15, 16) and of πίστις/πιστεύειν (vv 5, 8, 12, 16, 17). Attention should not be focused exclusively on v 17: the principal emphasis is actually on the saving power of the gospel (v 16b), with v 17 functioning as the chief justification (“for”) for the assertion (Zeller, Juden, 62). V 16b in fact ties the whole letter together (chaps. 1–15); though it is also true that v 17 in effect provides the text for the main didactic section (chaps. 1–11):

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a a. The omission of πρῶτον (first) by some witnesses, including B G and the Sahidic version, may be due to Marcion, for whom the idea of Jewish priority would have been unacceptable (Metzger). B Codex Vaticanus or MT MS, edited by Jacob ben Chayim, Venice (1524/25) G Greek translation: as published in Septuaginta, LXX ed. A. Rahlfs, 1935. In Daniel, G includes both OG and Th, as published in J. Ziegler’s ed., 1954.
God’s righteousness to faith:

“the righteous by faith … —1:18–5:21

… shall live” —chaps. 6–8

God’s righteousness from faith:

“the righteous by God’s faithfulness”—chaps. 9–11

(Feuillet, “Hab 2:4,” argues for a division after 5:11; but see on 5:1–21 Introduction). The scripture quoted (Hab 2:4) is not itself the text of the letter (Luz, “Aufbau”; against Nygren, Cranfield), but, as usual with Paul, is attached to the main claim to document it and to provide a scriptural basis for it.

The two key terms clearly have programmatic significance in what follows:

Faith—after dominating the key section, 3:21–5:21 (3:22, 25, 27–28, 30–31; 4:3, 5, 9, 11–14, 16–20; 5:1–2), it disappears from view in chaps. 6–8 to reappear at crucial points in chaps. 9–11 (9:30, 32, 33; 10:4, 6, 8–9, 11, 14, 17; 11:20) and again in chaps. 12–15 (12:3, 6; 14:1, 2, 22–23).

Righteous, righteousness, to hold righteous—equally the dominant theme in the same sections (3:20–22, 24–26, 28, 30; 4:2–3, 5–6, 9, 11, 13, 22; 5:1, 7, 9, 17, 19, 21; 9:30–31; 10:3–6), but more than “faith” providing a link into the intervening discussions (2:13; 3:4–5, 10; 6:7, 13, 16, 19, 20; 7:12; 8:10, 30, 33).

Ellis, “Exegetical Patterns,” 217–18, sees a midrashic structure in 1:17–18, with 1:17 as the proem text followed by a sequence of expositions and supporting texts.

Achtemeier takes 1:14–2:16 as a complete unit, arguing that vv 16, 17, and 18 ff. are grammatically subordinate to v 15. But that is to overload the significance of γάρ, which may denote lighter connections of thought or introduce an explanation without indicating where the weight of emphasis lies (cf. Harrisville—“throughout the epistle, and with only one exception … ‘for’ does not conclude but begins an argument, with or without any link to what precedes”; see also on 1:18). There is no reason here to depart from the usual recognition that 1:16–17 are the climax of the introduction and theme for what follows.

Comment

16 οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel.” For “shame” as the consequence of being shown to have acted on a false assumption or misplaced confidence, see particularly the Psalms (35:26; 40:14–15; 69:19; 71:13; 119:6; etc.); see also καταισχύνω in 5:5 and 9:33. This usage also fits Jewett’s “Ambassadorial Letter” thesis (15), since it may include the thought of the representative (of “the gospel of God”) not being put to shame in the face of a superior power.

As Barrett has shown, it is likely that some connection between this assertion and the Jesus tradition preserved in Mark 8:38/Luke 9:26 should be recognized (“Not Ashamed”). Paul herein shows awareness of the tradition of Jesus’ teaching and includes it within his own understanding.
of “the gospel”—the post-Easter interpretation of the “Christ-event” being consciously formulated in continuity with the proclamation of Jesus (see further on 1:1 and 12:14). This also means that Paul quite deliberately makes his own what must have been a shared affirmation among other early Christian communities who expressed their solidarity precisely in terms of their confidence in and loyalty to Jesus (Barrett, “Not Ashamed,” 128). As Michel had already pointed out, this likelihood of a firm connection between 1:16 and the tradition of Mark 8:38//Luke 9:26 confirms that the οὐκ ἐπαισχύνομαι should be taken in the sense of “confess,” “bear witness” against the older “psychological” interpretation (“Sprachgebrauch”; cf. particularly 2 Tim 1:8, 12). Herold, however, presses hard the overtones of legal procedure in ἐπαισχύνομαι (“it describes a forensic not a psychological process”) to argue that Paul speaks with a view to opponents in Rome (Zorn, chap. 1, esp. 140).

δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστιν, “for it is the power of God,” is a regular concept in Paul (particularly 1:20; 9:17; 1 Cor 1:18, 24; 2:5; 6:14; 2 Cor 4:7; 6:7; 13:4). By it he clearly has in mind a force that operates with marked effect on people, transforming them—as evident particularly in conversion (1 Cor 2:4–5; 1 Thess 1:5) and resurrection (1:4; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:43; 2 Cor 13:4; Phil 3:10)—and providing a source of energy to sustain that qualitatively different life (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 4:7; 6:7; 12:9; 13:4; Col 1:11, 29; 2 Thess 1:11; see also on 15:13). It was not a matter of blind trust that such a power must be operative whatever the appearances, but rather a matter of actual experience as indicated also by the plural = “miracles,” a visible and marked alteration in a current condition that could not be attributed to human causation (1 Cor 12:10, 28–29; 2 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:5; see also on 15:19). That Paul could be confident that the source of this power was God presumably follows from its context (a consequence of preaching the gospel) and continuing effects (cf. 1 Cor 4:20; 2 Cor 1:8; 6:7; 12:9; 2 Thess 1:11). In contrast to the strongly magic, al overtones which often gathered round the word in non-Jewish circles (TDNT 2:288–90, 309; MM), Paul’s emphasis on the power of God as embodied in and mediated through the gospel would have had a marked significance for his readers (cf. 1 Cor 1:18–25). Of the OT passages which speak of the effectiveness of God’s word and which Paul might have had in mind, Ps 107:20 is the most suggestive, particularly in view of its use in the ancient form of the kerygma preserved in Acts 10:36–38. On the power of the word of preaching cf. again 1 Cor 2:4–5 and 1 Thess 1:5; also John 6:63; 15:3; 1 Cor 4:15; James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23. See also on 1:20; 4:21; and 8:38.

εἰς σωτηρίαν, “with the effect of bringing about salvation.” σωτηρία would be familiar to Paul’s readers in the everyday sense of “bodily health, preservation, safety” (LSJ, MM); cf. e.g., Mark 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:52; Acts 27:34. In the religious meaning, which was of course

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cf. confer, compare
esp. especially
cf. confer, compare
cf. confer, compare
OT Old Testament
cf. confer, compare
LSJ Liddell-Scott-Jones, Greek-English Lexicon
cf. confer, compare
e.g. exempli gratia, for example
known in Greek thought, but which dominates the LXX (34 times in the Psalms, 18 in Isaiah) and NT usage (BGD), the physical imagery is retained in its sense of deliverance from peril and restoration to wholeness; see further Lagrange. As such in Paul it is primarily eschatological, a hope for the future, deliverance from final destruction (ἀπώλεια), the end product of God’s good purpose for humankind (see particularly 5:9–10; 13:11; 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5; Phil 2:12; 1 Thess 5:8–9; see further on 5:9 and 11:11). But through the power of the gospel (conversion—see above), the believer has already been launched toward salvation; hence the use of the verb in the present tense in 1 Cor 1:18, 15:2, and 2 Cor 2:15—God’s preservation through to final safety; and here the preposition εἰς has the force not simply of movement toward but of movement right up to and into, so “with the effect of bringing about” (cf. 10:10; 2 Cor 7:10; Phil 1:19; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:15; and see also on 6:16).

παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, “to all who believe.” Here as in other similar references to believers Paul uses the present rather than the aorist tense (3:22; 4:5, 11, 24; 9:33; 10:4, 10–11; 15:13; 1 Cor 1:21; 14:22; 2 Cor 4:13; Gal 3:22; Phil 1:29; 1 Thess 1:7; 2:10, 13; also Eph 1:19; aorist in 2 Thess 1:10). The significance presumably is that in such passages he wishes to focus not solely on the initial act of faith but on faith as a continuing orientation and motivation for life. For πίστις see on 1:17. The emphasis on “all who believe” has the ring of a “war cry” (Michel) and is fundamental for the rest of the letter (cf. particularly 3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 11): “all” is a key word for the letter (Gaston, Paul, 116; see further on 11:32). Faith is both the initial and the continuing access point for the saving power of God into human life, the common denominator which God looks for in every case. See further Form and Structure and on 3:22.

Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι, “to Jew first, but also to Greek.” “Jew and Greek” is the Jewish equivalent to the Gentile categorization of the world given in v 14, only here with “Greek” replacing “Gentile,” reflecting the allpervasiveness of Greek culture (cf. 2 Macc 4:36; 11:2; 3 Macc 3:8; 4 Macc 18:20; Sib. Or. 5.264). The two terms form a regular combination in Paul (2:9–10; 3:9, 29; 9:24; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:22–24; 10:32; 12:13; Gal 2:14–15; 3:28; Col 3:11); and note also 3:1–4 and 11:18, 28–29. The stepping back into a Jewish perspective (following on from v 14) will be deliberate. The phrase here reflects Paul’s consciousness that he was a Jew who believed in a Jewish Messiah yet whose life’s work was to take the gospel beyond the national and religious boundaries of Judaism. The πρῶτον here balances the παντὶ of the preceding phrase: he does not for a moment forget, nor does he want his Gentile readers to forget (“a certain polemical overtone”—Zeller, Juden, 145) Jewish priority in God’s saving purpose (cf. 3:3–4; chaps. 9–11); but equally fundamental is his conviction that Jewish priority does not shift the “terms of salvation” one whit beyond faith. The need to explain and defend this double emphasis is the driving force behind the whole epistle. For Ἰουδαῖος see further on 2:17.

LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT
NT New Testament
BGD W. Bauer, F. W. Gingrich and F. Danker, Greek-English Lexicon of the NT
cf. confer, compare
3 Macc 3 Maccabees
4 Macc 4 Maccabees
Sib. Or. Sibylline Oracles
cf. confer, compare
The sequence “Jew first but also Gentile” should not be taken as directly indicative of Paul’s missionary strategy, since he saw himself as first and foremost “apostle to the Gentiles” (11:13; 15:16); but since his natural constituency was the body of Gentiles who had already been attracted to or influenced by Judaism (proselytes and “God-worshipers”—see Introduction §2.2.2), it has some bearing on his evangelistic practice since the synagogue provided the most obvious platform for his message—“to the synagogue first and so to the God-fearing Gentile.”

Romans, NIC, Douglas Moo

C. THE THEME OF THE LETTER (1:16–17)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel,¹ for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and then to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is being revealed, from faith for faith, even as it is written, “The one who is righteous by faith will live.”²

These theologically dense verses are made up of four subordinate clauses, each supporting or illuminating the one before it. Paul’s pride in the gospel (v. 16a) is the reason why he is so eager to preach the gospel in Rome (v. 15). This pride, in turn, stems from the fact that the gospel contains, or mediates, God’s saving power for everyone who believes (v. 16b). Why the gospel brings salvation is explained in v. 17a: it manifests God’s righteousness, a righteousness based on faith. Verse 17b, finally, provides scriptural confirmation for this connection between righteousness and faith.

This chain of subordinate clauses is tied both to what comes before it and to what comes after it (note the “for” in both v. 16 and v. 18); from the standpoint of syntax alone, this means that the main statement of the sequence is Paul’s assertion of desire to preach the gospel in Rome (v. 15). Some interpreters accordingly question the common opinion that vv. 16–17 state the theme of the letter.² Isolating these verses as the theme of the letter, it is argued, betrays a preoccupation with theology at the expense of the argumentative and syntactical flow of the text.

But the syntax does not tell the whole story. Grammatically subordinate clauses frequently stand out in importance by virtue of their content—especially in Greek, with its love of subordinate clauses (hypotaxis).³ In the present case, the language of v. 16a implies a shift in focus. Up to this point, Paul has been telling the Romans about his call to ministry and how that ministry relates to the Romans. Since the gospel is the very essence of his ministry (vv. 1, 9) and

² The KJV addition “of Christ” reflects a secondary reading found in the corrector of D, Ψ, and the majority text.
³ Hab. 2:4
² See esp. Achtemeier.
³ Hence Achtemeier's assertion that “Grammatically, 1:17 cannot function” as the central theme of Romans is wrong (cf. Dunn).
is also the message that Paul wants to bring to Rome (v. 15), it has naturally figured prominently in these verses. Now, however, using v. 16a to make the transition, Paul turns his attention away from his own ministry and focuses it on the gospel as such. After this, nothing more is said of Paul’s mission plans or the Romans (except for brief interjections—7:1, 4; 8:12; 10:1; 11:13, 25; 12:1) until the “strong and the weak” section in 14:1–15:13 and the final summing up of Paul’s plans and prospects in 15:14–33. In other words, the epistolary material of 1:1–15 and 15:14ff. “frames” what appears to be a theological treatise.

Therefore, while vv. 16–17 are technically part of the proem of the letter, they serve as the transition into the body by stating Paul’s theme. Most scholars would agree with this conclusion; but they would not agree about just where within vv. 16–17 this theme is to be found. Protestant exegetes have traditionally focused on either “the righteousness of God is being revealed” or “the one who is righteous by faith will live,” understanding them as assertions of the theological theme of “justification by faith.” E. Käsemann and his many followers also see in “the righteousness of God” the theme of the letter, but they give the phrase a much broader meaning than it has in traditional Protestantism (see the excursus below). A few interpreters place the concept of “salvation” in v. 16b at the center. Still others are impressed by the way in which the phrase “to the Jew first and then to the Greek” (v. 16b) encapsulates two of the letter’s key themes: the incorporation of Gentiles within the people of God and the continuing significance of Israel. It is also possible to view the individual elements of vv. 16–17 as each summing up different parts of the letter. However, as we argued in the Introduction, the breadth of the letter’s contents requires a correspondingly broad theme. And standing out by virtue of its importance in vv. 1–15 as well as by its leading position in the structure of vv. 16–17 is the term “gospel” (for further exploration of the theme of the letter, see the Introduction).

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4 See Wilckens; Käsemann.
6 Cf., e.g., Hodge; Godet; Murray; Bruce; S-H (including both human justification and divine “righteousness”); Barrett; Michel.
7 Dahl, Studies, p. 82; cf. also Lagrange; J. Cambier, L’Évangile de Dieu selon L’Épitre aux Romains. Exégèse et théologie biblique. Vol. 1: L’Évangile de la justice et de la grace (Brussels/Louvain: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967), p. 34; Hoppe, Die Idee der Heilsgeschichte, pp. 26–27. These scholars then sometimes argue that the dual revelations of righteousness (v. 17) and wrath (v. 18) are subthemes.
8 Sanders, Paul, the Law and the Jewish People, p. 30; Schmithals, Römerbrief, pp. 12–13; cf. Beker, 72.
As we have noted, v. 16a explains (cf. the “for”) why Paul is eager to preach the gospel in Rome (v. 15). But it also picks up the various descriptions of Paul’s commitment to the ministry of the gospel in vv. 1–15 (cf. vv. 1, 5, 9, 14). The negative form of Paul’s assertion, “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” may be a literary convention (litotes), justifying our rendering it as a straightforward positive statement (cf. TEV: “I have complete confidence”). However, “the foolishness of the word of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18) would make some degree of embarrassment about the gospel natural—particularly in the capital of the Gentile world. It may also be that accusations to the effect that Paul’s gospel was antinomian or anti-Jewish lie behind this denial (cf. 3:8; 9:1–5).

The second clause in v. 16 explains (“for”) why Paul is not ashamed of the gospel. For this gospel, whose content is Jesus Christ, “appointed Son-of-God-in-power” (v. 4), mediates “the power of God leading to salvation.” The term “power,” as one might expect, is used widely in Greek philosophy and religion, but its NT background is undoubtedly to be sought in the OT teaching about a personal God who uniquely possesses power and who manifests that power in delivering (Exod. 9:16; Ps. 77:14–15) and judging (Jer. 16:21) his people.

“Salvation” and its cognates are widely used in both the Greek world and the LXX to depict deliverance from a broad range of evils. The NT as a whole uses “salvation” and its cognates
with much of the same broad range of meaning as the OT, whereas Paul uses the words only of spiritual deliverance. Moreover, his focus is eschatological: “salvation” is usually the deliverance from eschatological judgment that is finalized only at the last day. Characteristic, however, of Paul’s (and the NT’s) outlook is the conviction that these eschatological blessings are, to some extent, enjoyed by anyone the moment he or she trusts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is because of this “already” focus in Paul’s salvation-historical perspective that he can speak of Christians as “saved” in this life. “Salvation” often has a negative meaning—deliverance from something—but positive nuances are present at times also, so that the term can denote generally God’s provision for a person’s spiritual need. Particularly, in light of Rom. 3:23 and the use of “save” in 8:24 (cf. vv. 18–23), “salvation” here must include the restoration of the sinner to a share of the “glory of God.”

The last part of v. 16 introduces themes that recur as key motifs throughout Romans. First, God’s salvific power is available “to everyone who believes.” “Believe” and “faith” are key words in Romans; they are particularly prominent in 3:21–4:25. The lack of an explicit object after “believe” is also characteristic of Romans. This does not mean that Paul depreciates the centrality of Christ as the object of faith, but that the language of faith has become so tied to what God has done in Christ that further specification is not needed. To “believe” is to put full trust in the God who “justifies the ungodly” (4:5) by means of the cross and resurrection of Christ. Though intellectual assent cannot be excluded from faith, the Pauline emphasis is on surrender to God as an act of the will (cf., e.g., 4:18; 10:9). Pauline (and NT) faith is not (primarily) agreement with a set of doctrines but trust in a person. Though not explicit here, another focus of Romans is the insistence that faith is in no sense a “work.” Therefore, although we must never go to the extreme of making the person a totally passive instrument through whom “believing” occurs—for Paul makes clear that people are responsible to believe—we must also insist that believing is not something we do (in the sense of “works”) but is always a response, an accepting of the gift God holds out to us in his grace (see especially 4:1–8). As Calvin puts it, faith is “a kind of vessel” with which we “come empty and with the mouth of our soul open to seek God’s grace.”

eschatological deliverance (cf. Isa. 12:2; 25:9; 46:13; 49:6; 52:7, 10). Of these, Isa. 52:7 is particularly significant: in addition to σωτηρία, it also uses εὐαγγέλιζομαι (“preach good news”); note that Paul quotes it later in the letter (10:15). See the survey in W. Foerster and G. Fohrer, TDNT VII, 965–1024.

16 Cf. Rom. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:9; cf. also the use of σώζω (“save”) in Rom. 5:9–10 and the contrast between “those being saved” and “those who are perishing” in 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 2 Thess. 2:10.

17 2 Cor. 6:2: “now is the day of salvation”; cf. Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:5, 8.

18 Gk. πιστεύω.

19 Gk. πίστις.

20 Of the 21 occurrences of πιστεύω in Romans, 7 are in this section; for πίστις the figures are 18 out of 37.


22 Institutes 3.11.7; cf. also Nygren on this point.

But this same phrase introduces another recurring motif of Romans: the availability of God’s “power for salvation” for “all who believe.” This phrase occurs four other times in Romans (3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 11), in each case with particular reference to the breaking down of barriers between Jew and Gentile. Paul’s ministry to Gentiles derives from his understanding of the gospel itself as eschatological revelation that fulfills the OT promises about the universal reign of Yahweh. This required the elimination of those barriers between Jew and Gentile laboriously erected by the oral (and written—cf. Eph. 2:15) law. Nowhere does this principle receive more emphasis than in Romans, as Paul seeks to validate his gospel before a skeptical audience.

Yet it is typical also of Romans that Paul does not rest content with a reminder of the universalism of the gospel but immediately introduces a note of particularism: “to the Jew first and then to the Greek.” It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the key to understanding Romans lies in successfully untangling the two connected strands of universalism—“to all who believe”—and particularism—“to the Jew first.” The attempted resolution of this apparent paradox must await our comments on Rom. 9–11, but we must say something here about this particular phrase. In opposition to “Jew,” “Greek” must indicate, broadly, any non-Jew. What is the nature of the Jew’s priority (“first”) over the Gentile? Some scholars, indeed, have sought to remove any sense of priority from the phrase, but without success. Paul clearly accords some kind of priority to the Jew. Some suggest that no more is involved than the historical circumstance of the apostolic preaching, which, according to Acts, began with the Jews and moved to the Gentiles. But Paul must intend more than simple historical fact in light of the theological context here. If we ask what precedence Paul accords Israel elsewhere in Romans, we find that his emphasis is on the special applicability of the promise of God to that people whom he chose (3:2; 9–11). However much the church may seem to be dominated by Gentiles, Paul insists that the promises of God realized in the gospel are “first of all” for the Jew. To Israel the promises were first given, and to the Jews they still particularly apply. Without in any way subtracting from the equal access that all people now have to the gospel, then, Paul insists that the gospel, “promised beforehand … in the holy Scriptures” (1:2), has a special relevance to the Jew.

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25 Paul probably uses Ἑλλην (“Greek”) because he has no singular of ἔθνη (“Gentiles”) as part of his own word stock (Schlier). In v. 14, Ἑλλην is contrasted with “barbarian,” indicating that the word denotes a certain kind of Gentile. While, then, v. 14 describes the universality of the gospel from the point of view of the contemporary secular division of humankind, v. 16 makes the same point from the perspective of salvation history.
26 Marcion, to no one’s surprise, removed πρῶτον (“first”) from the text; Zahn suggested that πρῶτον modified the whole phrase (Zahn; see on this Zeller, *Juden und Heiden in der Mission des Paulus*, pp. 142–43); and Lietzmann dismissed the word as “a factually valueless concession to the ‘chosen people of God’ ” (“Eine faktisch wertlose Konzession an das ‘auserwählte Volk Gottes’ ”).
27 Barrett; Hendriksen.