

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

In order to be saved, we must “come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4). Romans is the most systematic presentation of the gospel that we have in the Bible. The key verses to the book are found in Romans 1:16-17.

Romans 1:16–17 (NKJV)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

After an introduction to the book in 1:1 – 17, called the PROLOGUE, verses 16 and 17 provide a summary thesis for the book. This emphasizes that we are saved by faith alone, but it must be the right kind of faith. A saving faith is a life-changing faith which is “**revealed from faith to faith**”. This means that each time a person truly believes it is followed by a demonstration in the life. Thus, it is REVEALED!

After introducing the gospel and telling us that all those who believe are saved and changed by it – after that summary introduction, Paul then backs up and gives a detailed presentation of what is involved in this gospel. He is going to give us a detailed accounting of “**the knowledge of the truth**” that he speaks of in 1 Tim. 2:4.

Where does he begin? Does he begin with “Jesus loves you”? Does he begin with “God wants you happy”? Does he begin with “if you believe in God, here is what you get”?

No! He begins with SIN! In fact, for the better part of three chapters, Paul emphasizes this: the theme of sin. You see, Paul knew nothing about a “feel good” message. He presented a message that convicted people of sin. It made people “feel bad” with conviction before it made them “feel good” with the balm of grace. This is where Paul begins his gospel presentation. This is where the knowledge of the truth starts.

The bad news comes first. In fact, to really appreciate the good news, you first have to know the bad news. And, it must be personal. We must see the offensiveness of our sin and then see Jesus as the answer to our sin problem. We must accept what God says and it starts by accepting what He says about sin.

So, what does Paul, under inspiration, tell us? Paul hits this subject of sin from 3 angles.

In 1:18-32 – Paul shows the condemnation of the **Pagan**. The pagan is one who has no regard for God, as outwardly demonstrated in his immoral and depraved lifestyle (cf. 1:18).

In 2:1-16 – He shows the condemnation of the **Moralist**. The moralist is self-righteous and looks down on others because he thinks he is better; but in fact, he is a hypocrite (cf. 2:1).

In 2:17-3:8 – Paul shows that the **Religionist** is also under condemnation. This person thinks they are okay because they have religion. They have an outward zeal for God and are serious about making themselves right through religious disciplines (cf. 2:25).

But, Paul shows that all alike are under condemnation: The outright wicked pagan, the hypocritical moralist, as well as the self-righteous religionist. Here is Paul's conclusion to the whole matter:

Romans 3:19–20 (NKJV)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

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

Note the language: All are under sin. None rise above it. It keeps us all down. There is none righteous, he says – there is none that are right before God. We are all wrong. We are all found to be guilty before God according to the righteous standard of God's law.

Note the language here in 3:20 where it says “...**by the law is the knowledge of sin.**” In terms of the knowledge of the truth, Paul starts with the knowledge of sin. This is the proper starting place in sharing the gospel. Note the connection between “the knowledge of the truth” in 1 Tim. 2:4 and “the knowledge of sin” in Rom. 3:20. The tool that God has given to bring conviction to the conscience is the law. No one can live up to the standard of the law. The law is like a mirror that shows us how dirty we are, but the law cannot cleanse us (cf. Ja. 1:23).

In the OT, Israel was under the Mosaic Law, consisting of **a UNIT** of 613 laws (cf. James 2:10). It was a rule of life – not a means of salvation. They followed it for sanctification – not salvation. However, it presented the HOLY STANDARD of God. The essence of the Mosaic Law is summarized in the 10 Commandments (cf. Matt. 22:36-40). Today, we are under grace (the Law of Christ) as a rule of life (cf. Rom. 6:14, Gal. 6:2). The OT code has been set aside. However, the NT code (the Law of Christ) repeats 9 of the 10 Commandments (the Sabbath commandment being omitted).

The **MORAL STANDARD** of God’s holiness does not change. This moral standard is a constant, as reflected both in the 10 Commandments and in the Law of Christ. People are universally accountable to this “**glory of God**” standard (cf. Rom. 3:23). The best way to show people their guilt is to measure them up against the moral standard of God’s righteousness, as reflected in the law.

People essentially think they are “good” people and tend to measure themselves against other people. We need to help them measure themselves up against the law, which is God’s holy standard, to see that they are not good. The function of the law is to reveal and magnify sin (cf. Rom. 5:5, 7:7, 13).

The law is summarized in the 10 Commandments. We might look pretty good measured up against other people, but how do we measure up against the law?

Let’s measure:

- 1) Have you ever told a lie? The law says: “You shall not bear false witness” (cf. Ex. 20:16).
- 2) Have you ever stolen something? The law says: “You shall not steal” (cf. Ex. 20:15).
- 3) Have ever had an immoral or lustful thought towards another person? The law says you shall not commit adultery, and Jesus said if you look with lust on another person, you have already committed adultery in your heart (cf. Ex. 20:14, Mt. 5:28).
- 4) Have you ever used God’s name as a cuss word? The law says God will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. This is called blasphemy. In the OT, they stoned people to death for this sin (cf. Ex. 20:7, Lev. 24:16).

5) Have you ever disobeyed your parents? The law says: “Honor your father and mother” (cf. Ex. 20:12).

6) Have you ever been jealous of someone? The law says: “You shall not covet” (cf. Ex. 20:17).

7) Have you ever had hatred in your heart for someone? The law says: “You shall not murder” (cf. Ex. 20:13) and 1 Jn. 3:15 says whoever has hatred in their heart is a murderer.

8) Have you ever failed to keep God first above all else? The law says: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (cf. Ex. 20:3). And, Jesus said the first and great command is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

So, how are you doing?

Realize that God is a perfectly holy God living in an all-holy heaven (cf. Isa. 6:3). He cannot let us into heaven with even one of these sins. The Bible says that God cannot look upon sin (cf. Hab. 1:13). The Bible in Ps. 5:4 says that evil shall not dwell with God. Rev. 21:27 shows that nothing sinful, nothing that defiles will enter into heaven. The penalty for one sin is DEATH. Adam and Eve sinned once, and God told them they must die.

Death means “*separation*”, and if we die with even one sin on our record, we will be separated from God forever in hell – in what the Bible calls the lake of fire.

So, the law shows we are ALL guilty of sin - and that we ALL need Jesus!

Galatians 3:19, 24 (NKJV)

19 What purpose then does the law serve? **It was added because of transgressions**, ...24 Therefore **the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.**

The Necessity of Repentance

The knowledge of the truth by which we must be saved starts with the knowledge of sin. Once we are made aware of sin by the convicting ministry of the Spirit (cf. Jn. 16:8) through the Word of God, then we are commanded to repent. Romans 2:4 says: ***“the goodness of God leads you to repentance”***.

The NT is clear concerning the need of REPENTANCE. If there is no repentance, there is no salvation. The word **repent** (*metanoeo*) simply means “*to change your mind*”. If you study the whole counsel of God, you will find that sometimes the Bible indicates that we need to believe in order to be saved and sometimes it says we need to repent. There really is no contradiction here, because a true saving faith always involves a proper “*change of mind*”.

We are saved by FAITH alone, but it must be the right kind of faith. And, a saving faith is invariably “*a change of mind*” kind of faith that fundamentally alters the thinking of a person. Our mind is forever changed about sin and about Jesus.

We change our mind and admit our spiritual bankruptcy and that we need Jesus as our Savior. We change our mind; and instead of rebelling, we now bow before the truth of Who Jesus is as Lord and Savior! In short, repentance is a change of mind about Jesus as Savior and Lord that comes from the heart.

Luke 13:3 (NKJV)

3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Luke 13:5 (NKJV)

5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

Whenever the Lord repeats something, it is for emphasis. We have a sin problem. We need a Savior. We need Jesus. Repent (change your mind) – acknowledge your sin problem and put your faith in Jesus! It is your only hope of heaven!

Acts 4:12 (NKJV)

12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”