CHAPTER THREE

ROM 1:16–17: GOSPEL AS GOD’S POWER FOR SALVATION TO ALL BELIEVERS

Paul’s letter to the Roman church has a long opening. Paul introduces himself as a sender, and greets the Roman Christians in Rom 1:1–7. Interestingly, unlike other letters, Paul inserts a long explanatory part about the gospel entrusted to him (Rom 1:2–4), which is the content and foundation of his ministry (Rom 1:5–7). According to this description, his gospel is relevant to Jesus, particularly his ministry of death and resurrection. Yet, in such a ministry of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit appear as the important factors. God is the initiator and performer of his promise in history (Rom 1:2), and the Holy Spirit is mentioned as the ruling power in the new realm, which is inaugurated by the ministry of Jesus’ resurrection (Rom 1:4; cf. Rom 8:11).¹ After the prescript, Paul expresses thanksgiving and his wish to see the Roman Christians in Rom 1:8–15; then, he begins to unfold his main argument in Rom 1:16–17.

As to the location of Rom 1:16–17, P.J. Achtemeier insists that as a part of Paul’s prescript, Rom 1:16–17 is purely linked with Rom 1:15.² However, there are at least two reasons to think of this sub-unit as a transition, which links the opening to the body of the letter.³ The first reason is the change of the person reference. Until Rom 1:16, Paul advances his letter with the first (Paul and his colleagues) and the second person references (the Roman Christians). However, from this sub-unit, the person reference is shifted to the third person. The

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¹ This interpretation is based on the antithetical expressions between κατὰ σάρκα and κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης, which appear as two representatives of the two realms (the old sinful realm vs. the new salvific realm) in the following argument of Romans (D.J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 50; T.R. Schreiner, Romans [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 43).
² P.J. Achtemeier, Romans (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 35–36.
second reason is that Rom 1:16–17 mentions both a major topic of the previous section, ‘his gospel (cf. Rom 1:1, 9),’ and several important topics in the following body part, such as righteousness of God, faith, salvation, Jews and Gentiles, etc. Thus, it is reasonable to think of this sub-unit as a transition, which works not only as a conclusion of the opening part, but also as a point of departure for his argument in the body of the letter. What, then, is Paul’s idea in this sub-unit (topicality) and how does he show his idea (focality)?

I. Text analysis of Rom 1:16–17

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4 Even though I use the analyzing format of the OpenText.org (http://opentext.org/texts/NT/Rom/view/clause-ch1.v0.html), the actual analyses in this book are mine.