

**Romans:  
Paul's Good News  
(The Theme of Romans)**

**Romans 1:16-17**

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you turn with me to Romans, chapter 1, as we continue to work through Paul's letter. In the first fifteen verses of this book Paul has successively given greetings to the Romans, shared a brief prayer report of what he had been praying about for them, and has given them an explicit expression of why it was that he wanted to come minister to them. We have seen the gospel of God at the very center of Paul's concern. He's spoken about the gospel already explicitly three times. He's spoken of the gospel, he's spoken of the gospel of God, he's spoken of the gospel of His Son.

And now in the passage we're going to look at this morning, he actually sets out the theme of the whole book. In these two verses he tells us what he is going to be talking about for the next sixteen chapters. Everything that follows Romans 1:16 and 17 is Paul's elaboration of it. And so as we hear God's word, let's bear that in mind. This is the holy word of God. Romans 1:16:

Romans 1:16-17

"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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Amen and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to hear Your word today, we pray that You would save us from apathy and over-familiarity with this truth. We have read this word many times. We have perhaps heard it explained, or taught or even preached many times. We pray, O Lord, that by the grace of the spirit you would give us fresh eyes to see this truth for us. Lord, as well we pray that as we come to this word this day that we would not come simply viewing our worship this day as a sentimental occasion, but as a day, a time, an hour to do business with You. Speak to our

hearts. Change us, challenge us, surprise us by Your word and transform us by it. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Paul packs a lot into these few verses. We'll see that as a tendency in Paul, not only throughout this book, but throughout all his writings. But I'd like you to see two or three things in particular today as we look at this grand declaration of the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans, the gospel which is the power of God under salvation, or the righteousness of God unto salvation. And the first thing I'd like to draw your attention to you'll see in verse 16.

### **I. Paul models a complete conviction and certainty of the gospel.**

In the very first few words of that verse Paul says I am not ashamed of the gospel, and so he identifies the fact that he is absolutely loyal to the gospel, and he has total confidence in it. In fact, in those little words, in that little phrase, Paul lets us see a glimpse of his complete conviction about his certainty of the gospel. In fact, I'm going to suggest to you this morning that that's a model for us to follow. Paul is modeling for us a complete conviction in, and certainty of, the gospel. Paul is not shy about this message. If you were to turn, and I'd invite you to do that right now, if you were to turn to I Corinthians, chapter 1 and look at verses 18 through 24, you will remember that Paul said similar things to the Corinthians. Paul understood that sophisticated, modern, learned, educated, intellectual, Roman and Greek hearers of his message might respond by saying, "Well Paul, how quaint. That's real nice, Paul, but we've got more important things to do." Paul understood that they might think that the gospel was foolishness. That they were above the gospel. They were too sophisticated for the gospel. That they didn't need the gospel. So Paul in I Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 18 through 24 says now by the way the gospel is foolishness in the eyes of some. But let me tell you, the ones to whom the gospel is foolishness are perishing, but to everyone who is experiencing the eternal life of God, the gospel is in fact the wisdom of God and the power of God. And that's exactly what he is saying to the Romans here. He's saying Romans, I'm fully aware that the culture around you in the city of Rome thinks that you are stark raving bonkers for believing what you believe. But I am not ashamed in the least of the gospel. And he glories in that gospel.

And before we look at what he means by the gospel, I just want to pause for a moment and say that though Paul is not making an exhortation here. Though he's not opening this sentence by saying I'm not ashamed of the gospel and don't you be either. Though he's not giving us an imperative in this passage, Christians make sure that you're not ashamed of the gospel. Yet, Paul's words do show us the heart of a true believer. A true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is not ashamed of the gospel. There is no shame in the gospel, no matter how foolish it may be in the eyes of the world.

And let me just pause right now and ask you, is this a temptation for you to be ashamed of the gospel? Sometimes Christians are ashamed of the gospel because they want things that are different than the things that God wants for them. I know a young man who once had begun a relationship with a young woman. They had gone out on a date, he'd had a great time. She was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. He was very interested in continuing this relationship. And they were talking on the phone the next day and the young woman said to him, "Now I heard some of my friends said that you are a Christian. Is that true?" He was immediately suspicious and on the defensive. Why is she asking this? So he asked, "Why do you ask?" "Well, I'm an atheist," she said, "and I don't want any of your religion. So if you can't leave that out of our relationship, we're finished right now." He denied, he denied the importance of Christianity to himself in order to continue that relationship.

It doesn't just happen to high schoolers. That happens to people in relationships all through life. Maybe it's in a business relationship. You are working with colleagues who are excellent at what they do. They are very competent in the business world, but they are profane. It shows in their language, it shows in their desires, it shows in their attitudes. And you are trying to be as cryptically Christian as possible. They respect you now, but you don't want them to know that this means that much to you, lest they think that you're just a little bit weird. Or maybe it's that you're back with some friends with college days. You know, you're having a cup of coffee, you're sharing a meal, and suddenly over dinner it strikes you. You know, back in college I was different from the way than I am now. I'm a mother now, I'm a mother of two children, and I want to rear them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I'm involved in my local congregation. I'm serious about the Lord Jesus Christ and suddenly being with these friends again reminds me that I wasn't that way. But, you know, being with them reminds that they still are. They are pretty much the same way that we were when we were in college together. They want the same things, they are excited about the same things, they're interested in the same things. And the Lord is not one of those things. They are happy to go to church. Don't get me wrong. They're happy to go to church, but a living, vital, saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is not very high on their agenda for life. Being transformed by the gospel is not something they are praying about every day. And I'm just a little afraid to let them know how much the Lord Jesus and the gospel means to me, because I might be rejected.

My friends, all of us are tempted and pulled by those kinds of things day by day. Former associates who knew us when who might not think so well of us if they knew how significant the gospel was to us. Business associates, relationships, things that we want. There are many ways in which we are tempted to compromise our Christian testimony and to compromise our confidence in the gospel and the apostle's words, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," are certainly a model for us, aren't they? We ought not be ashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the early church fathers, Apollinaris of Laodicea, once said

this: "The Son of God bore the shame of the cross on our behalf. It could not be but out of place for us to be ashamed of His suffering for us." If you really believe that God's own Son died for you, bore shame for you, how could you possibly be ashamed of Him around anyone for any reason?

You remember when Polycarp, the famous bishop of the early church was being roped to the stake to be burned at the age of 86. They gave him one last chance to denounce and renounce his faith in Christ. And he responded by saying, "eighty-six years I have served Jesus Christ, and He has never done me wrong. How could I do wrong now?" That's the situation that we face as Christians, day by day. Will we renounce Him or will we embrace His testimony and proclaim Him? That's the very first thing I'd like you to see as you look at this passage. We ought not to be ashamed of the gospel.

Now we haven't even said what the gospel is yet. And I know that's a word that we use. We use that word so much that we don't know what it means. We assume that we know what one another is talking about when we use the word gospel, but we're not really absolutely certain what it means. We may have a vague idea, we may even have a training course in which we studied a presentation of the gospel. We may have an outline of the gospel in our minds that goes something like grace, man, God, Christ, faith. Or we may have another tract that we like to use in our gospel presentation. We may use the Roman Road, or we may use various presentations of the gospel. But what do we mean by the gospel, and more importantly, what does Paul mean by the gospel?

Well, I simply want to point you to a couple of things. First of all, look back at verse 1 and verse 9 of Romans, chapter 1. Notice that Paul calls the gospel, "the gospel of God" in verse 1. And in verse 9 he calls the gospel, "the gospel of His Son." Clearly, in Paul's mind, the gospel is not something about what we do, it's something about what God does. Now, that having been said, if you study the book of Acts, and you study Paul's letters, Galatians, Philippians, etc. You will find that there are at least five components always present when the gospel is preached by the apostles. Now that's significant, because the apostles ought to know a little bit about the gospel. After all they wrote it down. And I'd like you to see those components that Paul uses. And to just give you an example of these, let me just ask you to turn to Acts, chapter 2, verses 22 to 39. And if you'll skim across those verses, I want to show you these five components.

First of all, the gospel always entails the assertion that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and Savior of God for Israel. Notice how Peter stresses that in Acts, chapter 2, verses 29 and 30. He's sitting there and he quotes a passage from the Psalms that David said, and then he said, "Now look, David was laid in the grave, and he's there to this day." So these words spoken by David can't refer to David, they've got to refer to Christ, that is Jesus Christ. What's Peter doing? He is rooting his presentation of the gospel in the Old Testament. And that gives it a whole tremendous

significance because in the Old Testament, the Old Testament prophets were speaking to Israel who was in rebellion against God. Israel was in exile because of their sin against God, and the good news of the Old Testament was that God in His grace was going to provide an anointed Savior, whereby they would be united to Him and His kingdom would reign in them and through them forever. And so by appealing to the Old Testament, Peter and Paul and the other apostles root the gospel in the Old Testament promises, and in the predicament that the Old Testament had told us about.

Secondly, if you look at verses 22 and 23, every biblical presentation of the gospel focuses on the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It explains the significance of Jesus' incarnation, and it explains the significance of Jesus' death. He died as a propitiation for our sins. Peter begins his sermon in verses 22 and 23 in Acts, chapter 2, by telling of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as part of the plan of God. It wasn't an accident, it wasn't murder in the sense that he was under the total control of the men who hated him. It was, in fact, something that was part of the very center of God's plan. And so the gospel always sets forth not only the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, it also sets forth the meaning of His life and death.

Thirdly, if you look at verses 24 through 32 of Acts, chapter 2, you will see that the gospel always entails an explanation of Jesus' resurrection. Here Peter goes on to say that Jesus not only died on our behalf, according to the plan of God, but He was raised again from the dead, as we're told in the Old Testament scriptures. The resurrection of Christ is significant for a lot of reasons. It's significant because it vindicates the claims of Christ. He is the Son of God. It is significant because it vindicates the satisfaction of God's justice. It shows us that God has accepted the penalty paid by Christ in our place, and so now accepts us. It shows us the hope of our future resurrection. It does a lot of things. And so the resurrection is at the very center of the presentation of the gospel in the New Testament.

Then if you look at verses 33 through 36 you see that the gospel presentation doesn't stop there. It goes on by mentioning the exultation to Christ, His ascension, His sitting at the right hand. If you would flip over to Acts, chapter 3 and look at verses 13 through 26, you would see that in addition to the exultation of Christ and his ascension and His sitting at the right hand, it is also emphasized that Jesus is coming again to judge the world.

So a fourth component of the gospel, in addition to the fact that the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies is there, the life and death of Jesus is explained, the resurrection of Jesus is explained, so also His exultation and judgment are explained.

So here's the gospel. It starts first of all with a shared understanding of the bad

news. We are created by God, we're in covenant with Him, we owe loyalty to Him, but we rebelled against Him. As we rebelled against Him, we were plunged into a state of sin and misery. There's nothing we could do to help ourselves in that state. Thus, here comes the gospel. The gospel is, God in His providence from the very time of Genesis 3:15, set a plan in motion in order to redeem His people. He promised in the old covenant that He was going to send a redeemer. Jesus is that redeemer. First point of the gospel.

Second point of the gospel. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who lived and died in our place that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Third point of the gospel. Jesus not only lived and died, He was raised again from the dead as a pledge of our hope and resurrection and redemption.

And fourth. Jesus is exalted, and He will come again to judge.

So the gospel is all about what God has done for our predicament. But, in all the presentations of the gospel in the New Testament, they don't stop there. They go on to press home. Repentance and faith. What's the response to the gospel? Believe, repent of your sins, trust in Christ. And you see this in Acts, chapter 2, look at verses 37 through 39. At the end of Peter's presentation of the gospel, the people have to remind Peter. Peter, okay, what do we do? And Peter says this is what you do. You repent and you believe. You repent of your sins and you believe that these things are true about the Lord Jesus Christ. You trust in Him with all your heart and the promise will be for you. My friends, that gospel, however it's presented, in whatever format you present it, that gospel is very offensive to people in our culture today.

In fact, there are at least three things offensive to people in our culture today about the gospel. First of all, is the Christian claim to absolute truth. The Christian in the gospel claims to have come face to face with the truth. I don't mean truth with a little "t," I mean truth with a capital "T." And that scares the living daylights out of post-moderates. They are very happy for you to have your little "t" truth, and for me to have my little "t" truth, and for them to have their little "t" truth; but people who found truth with a capital "T" are positively dangerous and need to be put in an asylum. And yet Christians say, in the gospel we have found the truth. In Jesus we have met the truth. We know the truth. We're convinced of it, and that's frightening.

Secondly, let me say that non-Christians are absolutely baffled by our insistence upon the uniqueness of Christ. They have been taught that all roads lead up the mountain. There's truth in all the religions. And suddenly here these Christians come trooping along with this gospel message, and they say, by the way, Jesus is uniquely the Son of God. He is the one revelation of the one true God. And that is absolutely astounding to post-moderns. They think, that's arrogant, that's biased, that's narrow-minded, that's even potentially bigoted. That will lead to

persecution, intolerance, etc., etc., etc. The only sins that are left, of course, are intolerance and discrimination. And anything that leads to them can't be good. And here these Christians come along saying Jesus is uniquely the Son of God, but they add insult to injury by saying oh, there's one more thing you need to know. He's the only way of salvation. He's not only the unique revelation of God. He is the only way into saving fellowship with God. Yes, we believe that. That's part of the gospel presentation, friends. And Paul says I know where you live. Paul faced an analytic pluralistic culture when he preached the gospel, and Paul knew that they thought he was absolutely crazy for believing those things.

Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel message. Are you? My friends, if we are ashamed of the gospel message, then we have never been gripped by its grace and power. Can a man ever be ashamed of the thing which saved his life and soul? You see, if you've really been saved by the power and the grace of the gospel, you can't be ashamed of it. Paul was a man whose life had been turned upside down by the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that he was headed for perdition and Christ laid hold of him. I mean, there was no way that he was going to be disloyal. There was no way that he was going to be ashamed. And if you and I are ashamed today, perhaps we have not tasted of the experience of the grace and power of the gospel.

## **II. Paul teaches that salvation is by faith in the gospel.**

And there's a second thing I'd like you to see in this passage today. Look at verse 16 again. Here Paul goes on to tell us the reason why he is so confident in the gospel. The reason why he is absolutely committed, the reason why he is not ashamed. Because the gospel is the saving power of God. Paul is teaching here that salvation is by faith in the gospel. Look at his words: "It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The gospel message, Paul says, is the God-appointed means for salvation. It's the instrument that God has developed in order to bring about salvation.

Now there's another one of those terms that we use all the time. We say gospel all the time, and we have no idea what we're talking about. We say salvation all the time, and we don't know what we are talking about. Brother, are you saved, we say. And sometimes we wonder, saved from what? Good question. Do we mean by salvation merely fire insurance? Do we mean by salvation that we're safe from the penalty of sin so that we can as we please? Many people in churches think so. That's not what Paul is talking about. What does Paul mean when he speaks about salvation? Well, we're going to be spending who knows how many weeks answering that question. But, can I give you a short answer?

By salvation, Paul means at least two things. Positively and negatively. Let's start with negatively. Negatively, Paul means that salvation is God's rescue of us from something. From what? From four things.

It's God's rescue of us from guilt, and I don't mean from feeling guilty. I mean from really being guilty. The rescue from feeling guilty is the result of being rescued from being guilty. I mean objectively being guilty. He rescues us from being guilty. We are guilty and he rescues us from it.

Secondly, he rescues us from the pollution of sin. Sin corrupts everything in us, and it dominates us so that we long for things that are self-destructive and bad and God displeasing. And God redeems us from that pollution in salvation. He rescues us from it.

Thirdly, he redeems us from slavery. Sin enslaves. Sin makes you really like it, and makes you think that you're going to find your fulfillment in what God tells you to do. And then at the very end, it says, oh yeah, by the way, this means eternal separation from God. It enslaves you. You may enjoy your slavery. You know you may be enjoying the adulterous relationship that you're in. You may think that it's the greatest thing that's ever happened to you. One day you will wake up and you will see that in fact you have been being drawn closer and closer to the yawning jaws of hell. It may happen when it's too late. That's how sin enslaves. It looks good, it feels good. In the end it is a way that leads to death. The gospel frees you from that. Now you see already there are people here today who say well, I don't want to be free from this. That's right. That's why the gospel is foolishness to you. But the gospel is the power of God and the salvation to all who believe. You see those who believe are those who realize my heavens I need this. I am guilty. I am polluted. I am enslaved to sin. I need to be freed and that's where the gospel comes along and says yes. Negatively, God frees you from all those things and more. He frees you from the penalty of sin, from alienation from God, from the wrath of God, from the eternal separation from Him in perdition. The gospel does all of those things negatively.

But secondly, positively, the gospel is not just a rescue of us from those things, Paul says. The gospel is a bringing of us into a new relationship, a righteous relationship with God, whereby we are stood before God and we can be confident before Him. We're accepted by Him. But the gospel not only brings us into a state of being accepted by God, it brings us into a state in which we are actually made holy. The holy spirit begins to work in us the life of heaven.

You remember Richard Sibbs? They said heaven was in him before he was in heaven. God does that to a certain extent in every believer. God begins to work the life of glory in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, so that we love the things that God loves, we hate the things that he hates, and we begin to even live like the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel brings men into freedom. Though we may have thought we were free when we were doing what we wanted to, you're really not free until you're doing what God wants you to do. Because what God wants you to do is not only glorifying for Him, it's the only thing that is good for you. Remember He made you; He knows. And so God, in His gospel, brings us in the



gospel. In salvation He brings us into an experience of true freedom, not freedom from obedience, but freedom to obedience.

And finally, salvation brings us into blessedness, fellowship with God. The love of God, eternal life, all those things. That's the gospel of salvation that Paul is talking about here. And that's what we mean when say salvation: rescue from guilt and pollution and slavery and punishment being brought into righteousness and holiness and freedom and blessedness.

But Paul says something very important for us to note here. Look at verse 16 here again. The gospel saves not all, but all who believe. Look at that again. The gospel saves not all, but all who believe. There are lots of people today who would like us to believe that the gospel is that all are saved. That's not what Paul teaches. It's the gospel to everyone who believes.

Do you notice two dimensions there? There's a universal dimension, and there's a particular dimension. Everyone who believes. Paul yearns for everyone to embrace the gospel, but he emphasizes that the gospel must be embraced, and it must be embraced by faith. This good news avails to everyone, Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, barbarian or cultured man, but it must be embraced by faith. Paul emphasizes that the gospel is by faith. Salvation is by faith in the gospel.

And notice again in that last phrase, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek," that Paul indicates that the gospel is the same in the Old and the New Testaments. It wasn't that there was one gospel in the Old Testament and one gospel in the New. That's not how Paul says it. Isn't it interesting how he says it. He says the gospel is for the Jew first. Often times we hear people say. Well, there's one way of salvation for the Jews, and one way of salvation for the Gentiles. And let's face it, friends. That's a little attractive to us as Christians because we're guilty of anti-Semitism. You know, we feel like we've been kind of hard on the Jews over the years. And we're tempted to kind in our discussions and say, well you know, maybe there are two different ways. But notice that's not how Paul says it. Paul says the gospel is for the Jew first. Now this is a Jew. He couldn't have been anti-Semitic. And he's speaking about a Jewish Savior who wasn't anti-Semitic. And he's speaking to a lot of Jewish Christians out there. The Jewish body is the first one to whom the gospel is to be preached. It's to the Jew first and also to the Greek. That's not just historically, that was Paul's pattern. He went into the synagogue first. He preached the gospel there first. Why? Because there's one way of salvation. Not two ways: One in the old and one in the new ,or two ways now. There's one way of salvation and that way is the gospel.

### **III. Paul tells us that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God.**

One last thing. We're already overtime, but one last thing. Look at verse 17

because I think this is one of the most exciting things that Paul says here, and frankly it is one of the most surprising. Paul explains how the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And let me say it is absolutely flabbergasting what he says.

He says that in the gospel there is a righteousness obtained by faith. Paul tells us that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. Now that is utterly surprising, friends. If you and I had been writing this we would have written it differently. We would have said the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for in it the grace of God is revealed. But that's not what Paul says. He says the righteousness of God is revealed. Or we would have said the gospel is the power of God under salvation for in it the love of God is revealed. But that's not what Paul says. He says in it the righteousness of God is revealed. Or we would have said the grace of God in the gospel and the mercy of God is revealed. All those things are true by the way. Paul will talk about those later in the book of Romans.

But notice, when he's giving his theme, he says, in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. What in the world is he talking about? What gets Paul so excited is that God has saved us in a way in which he causes His justice to be done full service. God has saved us by grace in such a way that He has been perfectly righteous in the way that He's done it. God has saved us in such a way that He has not swept our sins under the rug. He's actually dealt with them. He has not just cancelled them. He's liquidated them. And this is what gives Paul assurance. And this is what gives you and me assurance.

You see, if you thought that God had dealt with your sins by just saying, okay, let's just pretend like they're not there. And you knew that God was a righteous God. You would never, ever be confident of the security of your salvation because you would wonder how could a righteous guy not deal with sin? I don't understand. And Paul says, this is the thing that gets me so excited about the gospel. What gets me so excited about the gospel is that God has righteously saved me by grace. And the way he's righteously saved me by grace is He has caused the penalty for my sin to fall on His Son so that justice is served. And because justice is served, I am absolutely assured. Because if God has put the penalty for my sin on the head of His Son, God cannot righteously require the penalty from me.

The apostle Paul is saying, the reason I'm secure from the wrath of God is because it would be wrong for God to punish me if I trust in His Son, because God in His own design has saved me by grace by the death of His Son, by the work of His Son, by the righteousness of His Son, by the righteousness of His plan and that's what gets Paul so excited about the gospel. And that's what we're going to be studying by God's grace over the weeks to come. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, give us some inkling of just how glorious the gospel is and help us to embrace it by faith. In Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.

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