

Romans 1:16-17
The Gospel is the Power of God

Most of us remember when we had to sit through various English classes

- At the time, we thought that much of the information given to us was boring and meaningless

Yet as we grow older, I trust that you understand the significance of learning the English language

- It allows us to speak with clarity
- It allows us to hear with understanding

When it comes to the Bible, we need to understand the principles of English grammar and composition

- We don't throw out the rules of communication just because it is the Bible

One of the lessons that we learned in writing papers was the need to have a thesis statement

- This one sentence was a critical element in writing a paper
- The thesis statement was a one sentence summary of your purpose in writing a particular paper

As the apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans, he was supernaturally guided in his thoughts by the Holy Spirit

- We have recently introduced this book

In the first seven verses, Paul gives some introductory remarks

- Remarks about himself (1:1)
- Remarks about the Gospel (1:2)
- Remarks about Jesus Christ (1:3-4)
- Remarks about his audience (1:5-7)

In 1:8-15, Paul lists eight (8) marks of spiritual service

- A spirit of gratitude (1:8)
- A spirit of sincerity (1:9-10a)
- A spirit of submission (1:10b)
- A spirit of giving (1:11)
- A spirit of encouragement (1:12)
- A spirit of perseverance (1:13)
- A spirit of obedience (1:14)
- A spirit of eagerness (1:15)

But Paul is now at a critical juncture in the writing of this epistle

- He has introduced himself, his message, and his motivation to the Roman believers

Now Paul is ready to introduce the central thought that will formulate his thoughts for the rest of the book

- In so doing, Paul shifts the focus away from himself and onto the Gospel
- Romans 1:16-17 is the thesis statement of the book of Romans

Let's read Romans 1:16-17

In these two verses, Paul unveils the theme or thesis of this entire epistle

- These two verses are the summary of the contents of the remaining content of the book of Romans

Everything that will be discussed during the remainder of the book of Romans will, in some way, be tied to these two verses

- Romans 1:16-17 is literally the engine of this epistle

It should not surprise us that Romans 1:16-17 revolve around God and the Gospel

- Romans is, after all, a book about God and the Gospel

In Romans 1:16-17, Paul unveils the four-fold nature of the Gospel

- Shameless nature (1:16a)
- Powerful nature (1:16b)
- Righteous nature (1:17a)
- Faithful nature (1:17b)

I. Shameless nature of the Gospel (1:16a)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel.

We must remind ourselves that Paul has never visited the church of Rome

- He has attempted to visit this church on numerous occasions
- However, God has not allowed him to succeed

But as Paul contemplates ministry, specifically ministry in Rome, he states, “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel**”

- That is a momentous statement

The apostle Paul did not have an easy, care-free life

- Since converting to Christianity, Paul suffered hostility and rejection from many people
- Paul suffered because of his association with Jesus Christ

“Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Berea, laughed at in Athens. He had preached in Corinth where his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling-block to the Jews...”¹

But Paul was not ashamed of God

- Therefore, he was not ashamed of the Gospel

In the mind of the apostle, he couldn't separate God from the Gospel

- That is what we will learn throughout the remainder of the book of Romans
 - o God is the Gospel

As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, the Gospel could be summarized by the following:

- The death of Jesus Christ
- The burial of Jesus Christ
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ

The world around us has no problem with a Christ-less Christianity²

- They would have no problem with the religion of Christianity divorced from Jesus Christ

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 66-67.

² Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, 54.

But what we believe is inherently tethered to the person and work of Jesus Christ

- We can't separate the two!

If Paul was ashamed of the Gospel, this would indicate that he was ashamed of God

- But that wasn't the case

How many of us here this morning could say with a clear conscience, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel"?

- Before you answer too quickly, examine how many times you have failed to speak for the Lord when you were given opportunity

How many times have we chosen the easy road of silence vs. the hard road of speaking out for Jesus Christ?

- Believe me, I have been there multiple times myself

But Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because he was not ashamed of Jesus Christ

- Christ had delivered him from a certain, eternal death
- Christ had radically changed his life's direction and goal
- Christ has forgiven him all of his sin

How could Paul be ashamed of God?

- How could Paul be ashamed of the Gospel?

Turn with me to the book of 2 Timothy 1

- This was Paul's last-known letter
- He wrote this epistle to young Timothy who ministered in Ephesus as a pastor

Paul wanted to encourage Timothy

- But the manner in which he did this may be counter to how we might encourage someone

Paul told Timothy in verses 7-8, "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 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"

- Perhaps Timothy was prone to being timid and shy
- But that attitude could be mistaken as shame

So Paul urges Timothy not to be ashamed of the Lord

- Even if it meant that Timothy would suffer

Look at verse 12, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day"

- Paul suffers because he is not ashamed!
- He knows whom he has believed and knows that Jesus is able to guard what he has entrusted

On two occasions in the Gospel accounts, we are told, "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" (Mk 8:38; cf. Lk 9:26)

- Notice what Jesus said, "whoever is ashamed of Me and My words"

He groups His identity and His words together

- Just like Paul does in Romans 1:16

When I think of being ashamed of Jesus, my mind goes immediately to Peter

- Jesus had told Peter that he would deny Him three times
- Of course, Peter denied this, insinuating that he would never deny Him

Yet during Jesus' mocking and beatings at the hands of Caiaphas, Peter was in the courtyard

- One by one, Peter denied having any association with Jesus
- Peter was ashamed of Jesus Christ

With the third denial, we are told, "he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!'" (Mt 26:74)

- Peter remembered what Jesus said
- We are told that Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Mt 26:75)

Yet was that the end of the story?

- Was Peter's ministry destroyed?
- *Certainly not!*

After Jesus' resurrection, He intentionally sought out Peter and restored him to ministry

- We know that Peter enjoyed a faithful and fruitful ministry
- *Even though he had denied being associated with Jesus!*

I have oftentimes failed to represent the Gospel as I should have

- In so doing, I have chosen to be ashamed of the Gospel
- In so doing, I have chosen to be ashamed of the God of the Gospel, Jesus Christ

Perhaps you have been there as well

- But I am so grateful that there is forgiveness with God
- As Peter was restored, so we can be restored to ministry!

But how this Text should urge us to be bold in our testimony of Jesus Christ

- We have no reason to be ashamed

Paul goes on to describe a second feature of the nature of the Gospel in the latter half of verse 16

II. Powerful nature of the Gospel (1:16b)

for it is the power of God

A practical reason why Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel is given here in verse 16

- The Gospel "is the power of God"

In the first chapter of Romans, we have already seen some references to God

- The Gospel of God (1:1)
- The Son of God (1:4)
- The beloved of God (1:7)
- The will of God (1:10)

This morning, we will see two more

- The power of God (1:16)
- The righteousness of God (1:17)

God is the heart of the book of Romans

- God is the heart of the Gospel

The Gospel of God has inherent power within it

“power” is from the Greek word *dynamis*

- We derive our English words dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic from this Greek root word

It doesn't imply explosion

- Rather, it is the sheer power that is in focus

We behold powerful things in our everyday lives

- The power of an airplane to carry passengers around the world
- The power of Niagara Falls

But all human illustrations of power fall short of the power of God

- The Gospel is the power of God

Notice the focus is not on³

- The charisma of the speaker
- The excellency of the speech

Dwight L. Moody once said that the Gospel is like a lion

- “All the preacher has to do is to open the door of the cage and get out of the way!”⁴

The Gospel is not advice to people, suggesting that they fix their own problems⁵

- The Gospel is not a self-help manual

The Gospel is power

- The power of God

The focus is on the essence of the Gospel!

- The Gospel is the power of God!

Power to do what?

- What does the Gospel accomplish?
- Keep reading with me!

for salvation

The Gospel “is the power of God for salvation”

- What an amazing statement
- Paul affirms that the Gospel can effect salvation

³ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse*, 19.

⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *NAC*, Vol 27, 70.

⁵ Morris, 67.

“salvation” is a rather broad topic

- It implies deliverance and rescue⁶
 - o Forgiveness of sins
 - o Acceptance before God
 - o Deliverance from the wrath of God
 - o New life in Christ
 - o Restoration of all that sin has marred

Negatively ⁷	Positively
To rescue men from sin's: <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Guilt2. Pollution3. Slavery4. Punishment<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Alienation from Godb. Wrath of Godc. Everlasting death	To bring men into the state of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Righteousness2. Holiness3. Freedom4. Blessedness<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Fellowship with Godb. Love of Godc. Everlasting life

Paul did not focus the Gospel on social, moral, or political reform⁸

- The Gospel addresses the spiritual needs of sinners who need a Savior
- The Gospel doesn't promise to eradicate every problem of living in an evil society

We know from the remainder of the NT that salvation is used in reference to the past, present, and future⁹

- Justification – being made right with God
- Sanctification – growth in holiness
- Glorification – ultimate transformation into the likeness of Christ

Regarding the **past**, we have been delivered from the **penalty** of sin

- "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Ro 6:23)
- We have eternal life through Christ – not spiritual death and separation

Regarding the **present**, we are being delivered from the **power** of sin

- "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." (Ro 6:14)

Regarding the **future**, we will be delivered from the **presence** of sin

- In heaven, there will be no more sin
- Hallelujah, what a thought!

⁶ Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary*, 33.

⁷ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Romans*, 60.

⁸ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines, Vol 1*, 161.

⁹ Mounce, 71.

Past ¹⁰	"when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph 2:5)
Present	"For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Co 1:18)
Future	"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." (Ro 5:9)

to everyone who believes,

Who can qualify for the salvation that the Gospel accomplishes?

- Friend, that is part of the good news!

Verse 16 tells us that the power of the Gospel is available "to everyone who believes"

- Not to those who are wealthy or healthy
- Not to those who have been circumcised
- Not to those who have tried to keep the Law¹¹

The simple qualification given by Paul is belief

- This is the simple message of salvation

God does not first ask men to behave

- But to believe¹²

Christians are never called behaviors

- They are called believers

What does Paul imply by this term "believes"?

- It is critical for us to understand what the Bible says about saving belief
- Many are misunderstood about this word

Let's first state what saving belief is not

- It is not merely agreeing to historical facts
- It is not merely agreeing that Jesus lived a good life
- It is not merely agreeing that God exists

Saving belief must be personalized and internalized

- It must be appropriated personally
- No one can make that choice for you

Saving belief is

- Trusting that Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinners
- Believing that God's Word is the Truth and tells the truth about how a person can be saved
- Committing your life to Jesus Christ, surrendering your personal goals and desires in humble obedience to Him

¹⁰ Morris, 68.

¹¹ McClain, 58.

¹² John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Romans 1-8*, 55.

William Hendriksen defines faith as “the trunk of the tree whose roots represent grace, and whose fruit symbolizes good works

- It is the coupling that connects man’s train to God’s engine
- It is the sinner’s empty hand stretched out to God, the Giver”¹³

It is humbling to see such a simple requirement for salvation

- Belief!

Yet even the faith that we have to trust in God is a gift from God

- It is not a work that we generate¹⁴
- We can’t even take credit for believing in Him

Salvation, from beginning to end, is all of God!

- To Him be the glory!

The power of the Gospel is available to any and all who believe!

- Jew or Gentile
- Man or woman
- Young or old
- American or non-American

I will note in passing that Paul speaks of believing as a present tense, continuous action

- He doesn’t write that the Gospel is the power of God to everyone who believed
- But to those who believe

Faith is not a one-time event or decision in the past

- Faith is a very real certainty
- Faith is exercised every day of our lives

to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Paul tells the Roman believers that the Gospel has gone forth “to the Jew first and also to the Greek”

- This was a standard expression designating the entire breadth of humanity
- Everyone is either a Jew or a Gentile!

We know that the Gospel historically went forth to the Jews

- In the OT, God had covenants with the Jewish people
- Paul will list Abraham as the model believer

When Jesus sent out His twelve apostles, He told 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” (Mt 10:5-6)

Paul followed this pattern, as we see in the book of Acts¹⁵

- Upon entering a city, he would first go to the Jewish synagogue
- If they rejected him, Paul would go to the Gentiles

¹³ Hendriksen, 61.

¹⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT, Romans*, 67.

¹⁵ Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Romans*, 19.

In verse 17, we are given two more essential descriptions of the nature of the Gospel

III. Righteous nature of the Gospel (1:17a)

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed

Inherent within the Gospel is the self-revelation of God

- If God has not manifested Himself through the Gospel, we would not know certain elements about His nature and character

The apostle Paul tells us here in verse 17 that the Gospel reveals “**the righteousness of God**”

- This phrase has been the source of some confusion over church history

Some have taken this phrase to refer to the character of God

- He is referred to as righteous in many Bible passages

Others take this phrase to refer to the changed status in the lives of those who believe in the Gospel

- Sinners who were condemned are now given a new status of acceptance with God

First of all, notice that Paul speaks of “**the righteousness of God**” (emphasis mine)

- He is not speaking of the righteousness of man

In other words, the apostle is not speaking of what man can do for himself

- He is speaking of what God alone can do for mankind

We tend to think in terms of human comparison or human standards

- We use such phrases as “better than most” or “not as bad as others”

But God’s standard is His own perfection and righteousness

- He is perfect
- We are not

Imagine if a man thought that he could earn 20% of the righteousness needed to enter heaven

- Righteousness earned through good works, financial giving, and relative goodness

But he can’t cling to the 20% and ask God for the remaining 80%

- Donald Grey Barnhouse states that this individual “**must learn to curse his twenty per cent of human righteousness, abandon all hope of salvation by means of it, and come to the cross of Jesus Christ to receive one hundred per cent of a totally different righteousness which is provided by the Lord Jesus Christ on the basis of His atoning death for sin and sinners**”¹⁶

We dare not approach God thinking that we bring something to the table of salvation

- If you think that you have some part of the gift of salvation, you don’t fully understand the depth of your own sin and the richness of the righteousness of God

¹⁶ Barnhouse, 182.

Paul will tell the Roman believers in Romans 3, "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**" (Ro 3:23)

- We have all sinned, thereby falling woefully short of God's glorious and perfect standard of righteousness

So we need to delete the human comparisons and standards from our minds

- I can't say, "I am better than some"
- I can't say, "I am not as bad as others"

That is a damning thought whereby I have elevated my view of my own righteousness

- Instead, I must admit, "Holy and righteous God, I have no righteousness of my own. On the contrary, I have nothing but unrighteousness to bring to You. However, I cling to the cross of Jesus Christ, trusting and relying in Him that He paid my sin debt on the cross of Calvary! Therein I have been declared righteous, having received the free gift of salvation through Christ."

We must turn away from all self-effort and human achievement

- We must cast ourselves totally upon the Gospel which has the power to save those who believe¹⁷

Turn to Philippians 3

- This is Paul's own testimony of how his own righteousness contrasted with God's righteousness

In Philippians 3:3-6, Paul talks about his former manner of life as a Pharisee

- No doubt Saul often boasted in his pedigree and religious achievements

Notice what he writes in 3:7-9, "**But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**" (Php 3:7-9)

- Whatever was a gain, Paul treats it as a loss
- He has exchanged his own righteousness from the Law for the righteousness from the Lord
- Verse 9 says the same thing that we are discussing in Romans 1:17, "**the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**"

from faith to faith:

The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God

- We must believe this truth, even though it is foreign to our thinking

Paul writes that the righteousness of God is revealed "**from faith to faith**"

- It is translated differently in various English translations

But the essence of this phrase is that it is "faith through and through"¹⁸

- The whole of salvation begins with and is sustained by faith

¹⁷ Johnson, 33.

¹⁸ Morris, 70.

Romans 1:17 was one of the crucial texts which birthed the Protestant Reformation

- This verse was used of God to liberate men and women from the tyranny of the works-based Catholic religious system

Sinners discovered that God bestows His righteousness on sinners regardless of their merit and works, but solely on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross

- What a thought!
- What a Savior!
- What a Gospel!

Paul has discussed three components of the Gospel thus far

- Shameless nature (1:16a)
- Powerful nature (1:16b)
- Righteous nature (1:17a)

He has one remaining component to discuss in the last half of verse 17

IV. Faithful nature of the Gospel (1:17b)

as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

In Romans 1:2, Paul told us that the Gospel was "promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures"

- The Gospel was prophesied throughout the Old Testament

It is fitting, then, that the apostle Paul closes this thesis statement on the four-fold nature of the Gospel with a reference from the Old Testament

- This was to show that Paul was not making up any of this information
- Rather, he was building his case on the firm foundation of the Old Testament, the sacred Scriptures

Paul goes back to the prophecy of Habakkuk

- Three chapters in length
- That is very short when compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel

Habakkuk lived during a time when wickedness seemed to triumph¹⁹

- Sin was being committed and God seemingly didn't intervene
 - o The needy were exploited
 - o Strife, contention, and violence were rampant
- So the prophet cried out to God, asking for some answers

God answered the prophet, "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith" (Hab 2:4)

- God assured His prophet that wickedness would not triumph ultimately
- All sinners would be punished²⁰

But God also promised that righteousness would be vindicated

- The entire earth would one be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD (Hab 2:14)

¹⁹ F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale NT Commentaries, Romans, 75-76.*

²⁰ Hendriksen, 65.

But in the meantime, the righteous would live by faith

- Trusting God's plan
- Trusting God's timing

This verse from Habakkuk 2:4 is referenced three times in the New Testament²¹

- Here in Romans 1:17
- Paul cites it also in Galatians 3:11
- The author of Hebrews cites it in 10:38

We oftentimes identify with Habakkuk's situation

- We see rampant sin taking place around us
- We wonder, "How long, O Lord?"

But God would tell us what He told the prophet Habakkuk

- **"The righteous will live by his faith"** (Hab 2:4)

Isn't it interesting that Paul discusses the righteousness of God before he discusses the wrath of God?

- Look with me briefly at Romans 1:18, **"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness"**

Romans 1:18-3:20 will discuss the universal condemnation on sinful humanity

- All humans have sinned and fallen short of God's glorious and perfect standard
- Therefore, we all stand condemned!

Yet Paul issues forth this thesis statement first

- He wants to tell us the good news before he tells us the bad news

The apostle Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel

- This is because he was not ashamed of Jesus Christ
- Jesus is the Gospel

At times, you may be tempted to be ashamed of the Gospel

- The Gospel certainly won't make you popular
- The Gospel may cause you to lose friends, employment, or family
- The Gospel may cause you to look the part of a fool for believing the message of the Bible

But I can assure you on the authority of God's Word that you will never be ashamed for standing up for the Bible

- For as you boldly proclaim the Gospel, you boldly proclaim your love for the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul has reminded us this morning that the Gospel is not a bunch of magical words that can change someone

- The Gospel is the proclamation of Jesus Christ

This morning, I have two questions for you

- These are very simple questions that every one of us can answer

²¹ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 63.

The first question I have is, “**Do you believe the Gospel**”?

- Do you personally trust in, rely upon, and adhere to the tenets of the Gospel?
- Have you submitted and surrendered your life to Jesus Christ?

The Gospel can't change you if you don't believe it!

- But when you stop looking at yourself and what you can accomplish and instead look to the Lord and what He can accomplish, then the power of the Gospel can be unleashed in your life!

The second question is, “**Are you ashamed of the Gospel**?”

- Are you embarrassed or humiliated by the Gospel?
- Do you feel uncomfortable telling others about the Gospel?

If you do feel uncomfortable about proclaiming the Gospel, you are uncomfortable telling others about Jesus

- There is absolutely no reason why you should feel ashamed about Jesus

He came to this Earth and lived a perfect life

- He died on the Cross as a Substitute for sinners
- He died so that you might have eternal life

He wasn't ashamed to die for you

- Are you ashamed to live for Him?