
The Centrality of the Gospel

Romans 1:8-17¹

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We live in a world of uncertainty, maybe more so than ever before.

The latest natural disasters have reminded us of the uncertainty of the physical world.

We have uncertainties about our jobs and financial future.

We have uncertainties about our health and medical system available to help us.

We have uncertainties about our place in the world as a nation.

These are realistic uncertainties. We know that the future is in God's hands. But we may and often do go through deep troubles, just a everyone else.

Then there are uncertainties that are dangers, debilitating and maybe even damnable.

Many have questions and doubts about the existence of the God of the Bible...

Many are not certain that this world with all its twists and turns, all its history and movements of nature and nations is in God's control...

Many are not certain about the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Bible, the Word of God...

Many are not certain that the gospel is the only way of salvation, the only hope to reconciliation to God and restoration of all that is...

But I want to declare to you that we are certain:

God exists and has revealed Himself in the and through the Word of God...

The gospel is true. Jesus' death and resurrection is the only way of salvation. Believing and bowing to Jesus Christ, the Lord, is the only way people may be saved.

This certainty makes the gospel central to all of Christianity. Paul develops that thesis in this section of Romans 1.

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Its Sacrificial Ministry**(v.8-15)**

Paul has two clear purposes in this paragraph. He establishes a relationship with them. He sets forth both his desire to visit them and how that has been hindered. His absence from Rome is not a matter of personal concern but of providence. Further, he models how the integrity of the gospel shapes the ministry of the gospel. He endeavors to lay a blueprint by which he will actually minister through the book itself.

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

In Its Priorities**(v.8-10)**

The ministry of gospel is dependent on and empowered by prayer. It is evident from all of Paul's books that he was a man who prayed. No model of ministry then can be complete without prayer, God-ward and people-ward. Paul's prayers in his letters flow from his priorities in ministry.

His prayer is marked by its rejoicing. He is thankful that their faith is being announced all over the world. The gospel he proclaims is effective to save and sanctify people. That it changes lives ought to be a constant source of gladness and gratitude. Notice that his gratitude is two-fold: for them as believers and then for the good news of their faith widely spread. So the life changing power of the gospel is a priority.

His prayer is marked by its requests. He prays for them and for a ministry among them. His life of intense service focuses his prayer in the so far thwarted desires and plans to come. Verse 9 is critical to understanding why this is here at this point. He is serving God with all his might in the gospel. Since this is so, he is determined to minister to them and this letter serves that purpose until it can be face-to-face. Yet his determination is not presumption. His wants are still subject to God's will, not grudgingly, but gladly. So ministry in the gospel with all our might is a priority.

In Its Involvement**(v.11-13)**

Paul points to three impart aspects of his involvement and interaction with them in ministry.

He establishes a relationship bond (v.11). He longs to be with them. What he wants to accomplish among them in the gospel for the sake of the Name is a ministry of the heart.

He expects a reciprocal benefit (v.12). They will be established and he will be encouraged. There is mutual effect of sharing their faith and grace. He comes to them on an authoritative basis, but humbly desires that being with them will encourage him as well.

He expresses a resolved purpose (v.13). In spite of being unable to carry through with his plans, he is determined to minister to them. Here is an aspect of gospel ministry that we all must embrace with a sense of reality. We make our plans to accomplish our purposes, while we happily bow to the providences of God. This is part of believing God in an obeying way.

In Its Motivation

(v.14-15)

These two sentences establish a very important connection for us. They help us to see how our duty and desire are to be related, how we respond to God's commands and calling.

Paul speaks first of his duty (v.14). Our translations tend to use the word, obligation. This is not some psychological or emotional debt that is to be paid, but a responsibility arising from his calling, his apostolic office. His calling from God places him in debt to those he has been sent to, whether they are considered culturally (Greek/Non-Greek) or intellectually (wise/ignorant). God has given him a stewardship of the gospel, entrusting him with its riches and treasures. But he is to be a conveyor of those treasures to others. It is not his to keep. Hence, his duty is a debt and an obligation.

His duty is his delight (v.15). Since he has this obligation, this debt, this duty connected to ministry, then he is eager for the opportunity. The NASB tries to capture the sense of the emphatic here, "as for myself." We should hear this like this. "I have a responsibility and (not but) I am most certainly and emphatically eager, ready and willing to preach the gospel to you." This is the Biblical pattern for us. If we understand the gospel, its power, purpose and priority, then our obligations in it are carried out grudgingly, but gladly. If this is not the case, what is required is *repentance*.

Its Unquestionable Certainty

(v.16-17)

Both in a negative and positive sense, Paul affirms his confidence in the gospel. His duty and delight in preaching gospel is grounded in the certainties of the gospel. He is eager to preach, not only because of his obligation to the people, but also because of his confidence in its power.

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The perceptive comment has been made that it is of little use to assert that one is not ashamed if there is little temptation to be ashamed. (Stott, citing James Steward, p.60) All of us want to place our hesitancy in evangelism as a matter of fear. I would suggest that it is rare that the Bible does this. Our unwillingness to share the gospel may well be more the

result of being ashamed and embarrassed about what the gospel says. Once again, we must repent and place our confidence in the gospel certainties.

As the Power of God for Salvation

(v.16)

The power for salvation to those who believe is embedded in the gospel. People are saved when the gospel is preached because the gospel is both the message of what God has done to provide salvation and the means/method by which God communicates that salvation. These two elements are critical to our understanding of the power of God for salvation. The message must be clear. The gospel cannot be altered or abandoned or obscured without dire affects for our evangelism. The message of man's sin and God's salvation must be given so that what is heard is what God has done. And the method must be used. Our primary aim in evangelism is to thoroughly good news people. We must be so committed to the message and the method as God's saving power that we become eager to carry out our responsibility.

As the Revelation of God's Righteousness

(v.17)

This theologically dense verse is the second thread of Paul's theme. The reason he is not ashamed of the gospel is that God's righteousness is revealed in it.

Many suggestions are given as to what each of these phrases mean. The diversity and ingenuity of the commentators is stunning and confusing. John Stott's way of synthesizing this was quite persuasive to me.

The righteousness of God here is the character quality of God that actively moves on behalf of men and gives them a right standing with Him. Since this is the anchor for this theme, what is referred to here unfolds through the book and in the gospel. The gospel tells us that there is a just and righteous God before whom we must have a right standing. It also tells us how God can be just and still justify sinners. And the gospel tells us how sinners can receive that righteousness, that right standing before God. So the righteousness of God is an attribute (the way He is), and activity (He comes to our rescue) and an achievement (He bestows a right standing upon us). (Stott, pp. 61-63 for all of the above). Stott summarizes it this way, "The righteousness of God is God's righteous initiative in putting sinners right with Himself, by bestowing on them a righteousness which is not their own, but His.

This righteousness is revealed, that is seen and secured only by faith. It appears that this from (or by) faith to faith is meant as an emphatic. This righteousness solely by faith is certainly a major burden of Paul in Romans.

The quote from Habakkuk 2:4 serves as both the foundation on which the certainty of the gospel rests and the framework for chapters 1-8. It is almost certain that the translation by the ESV is correct: He who is righteous by faith, shall live. The quote places the emphasis upon faith: faith is how righteousness is appropriated and how the community of faith lives. Paul then uses the word faith at least 25 times in chapters 1-4 and life only twice while using the word life 25 times in chapters 5-8 and faith only twice. So the ones who are righteous by faith, Romans 1-4, shall live by faith, Romans 5-8.

So the gospel is God's power to save us and to give us a right standing before God in our salvation and in our sanctification. This is why we must not be ashamed of the gospel and why we must preach the gospel to ourselves every day.

Reflect and Respond

So the gospel is centered on God.

It is God's good news (v.1-7) about Jesus Christ to be proclaimed to all so they will believe in an obeying way.

It is God's good news for and among God's people, central to Biblical ministry, establishing its priorities, purposes and motivations (v.8-15).

It is God's good news about His saving power and revealed righteousness by faith alone to those who believe (v.16-17).

So, do you believe? Do you trust God? Will you believe and bow to the God today?

