

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

“Not Ashamed”

Romans 1:16-17

Turn with me to Romans Chapter One. This will be our fourth study in this wonderful chapter of Scripture, and we still have more to come. This time we will be looking at just two verses, 16 and 17. But what we have here, if we allow our ears to hear what the Spirit is saying, will change our world. Paul says this:

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

In our first study I said that many believe these two verses form the theme of Paul’s letter to the Romans. In this brief statement the apostle compresses his epistle into these basic truths:

- 1) The Gospel of God is the power of salvation.
- 2) The righteousness of God is revealed as man’s greatest need.
- 3) The just shall live by faith.

In the first 15 verses of chapter one, Paul gave us his opening statement. And this statement has two parts. In the first part, verses one through seven, he introduces us to the content of the Gospel. And then in verses eight through 15, we are given his personal representation of the Gospel. First, we looked at the message. And then we looked at the messenger — the servant. So now he turns the corner and crystallizes the thesis of the epistle, which he will unfold in the rest of the book.

Do you see how important these two verses are?

In fact, verse 17 is so important to Paul’s theology that he uses the phrase, “the just shall live by faith” in three of his letters.

Did any of you look to see the four places where this phrase is used in the Bible?

Hold onto your answer, we will get there later in our study. The important thing to understand is that we need to get a proper perspective on these two verses. Then we can move on and see how Paul builds on them in the rest of the letter.

Remember last time we left off with Paul saying that he was ready to come to Rome and preach the Good News. He had this burning desire in his heart to go and minister to this

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

group of believers. And that is also important to keep in mind. Paul does not want to go there and preach to the lost per se. He wants to train up the Romans to do the work of the ministry. That is why he said he wanted to share fruit with them. And he is chomping at the bit to get started. That is why he says this in verse 16:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ

Did you pray this week about whether or not you were ashamed of the Gospel? It is an intimidating thought, isn't it?

And the truth of the matter is, almost all of us are to one degree or another. This word, "ashamed," as Paul is using it, carries with it the thought of being embarrassed because you have been proven wrong.

So why would someone in Paul's time be ashamed of the Gospel?

Well, to the Jews, it was shameful to be hung on a tree. So to suggest their Messiah was crucified was an abomination to them. It still is, even to this day.

Among the Greeks, the Gospel was thought to be an inferior, even ignorant, position. They had gods for any and every thing. Remember when Paul went to Athens. They had monuments to all of their gods, even to the unknown one, just in case they forgot one. So to say to them that there is only one God who created all of this seemed ludicrous to them — especially the part about the resurrection from the dead.

And to the Romans, Christianity was a religion of the slaves and dregs of society. Rome was an empire of power. So why would they follow a lowly Jewish carpenter who died on a cross in Judea? We will talk more about real power in just a moment.

And we still face those types of criticisms even in our time — especially the accusation that we are ignorant. Some believe that in order to follow Jesus, you have to check your brain at the door. They see all the talk about sin and death as foolishness. The people of the world desperately want to believe they can somehow save themselves. They believe that they are okay in God's eyes because they are good people. And they loudly proclaim their gospel. So we tend to be silent when we should speak.

The people of the world have also been taught that the Bible is full of errors. After all, their "wise" men tell them so.

But do you know what usually happens if you ask them to point out one of the errors?

They have no answer.

That is why Paul is not ashamed — because he believes the Gospel he shares is right.

Why?

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

Because he has seen what happens when God's Word is spoken and taught. In 2 Timothy 2:15 he tells his protégé this:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

If we are rightly dividing God's Word, we are sharing not just some truth but *the TRUTH*.

That is what Paul is going to do when he gets to Rome. So he won't be intimidated by the religionists or philosophers. After all, they didn't intimidate him in Athens. He was not intimidated in Corinth or Ephesus or any of the other Gentile cities he went to. And he most certainly was not intimidated in Jerusalem. In fact, he was more than willing to get up and speak the Gospel in front of the very Jews who wanted to stone him.

So why would he be ashamed here in Rome?

He wouldn't!

That is where we need to hang our hat as well. If we are sharing the truths that are found in God's Word, we have nothing to be afraid or ashamed of. And the truth of the matter is, when someone rejects the Gospel, they are not rejecting you. They are rejecting Jesus. So, like Paul, we can be proud of the Gospel and its message. Look what it contains (verse 16b):

for it is the power of God to salvation.

Rome was reputed to be the center of world power. The empire literally spanned the entire known world at that time. But despite all her power, Rome was powerless to change men's lives. In fact, her wealth and prowess did the opposite. The city was said by ancient philosophers to be "a cesspool of iniquity" and a "filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood." There was no salvation to be found anywhere in the empire. But not so with the Gospel.

By this time Paul had seen countless lives transformed by the power of God. He realized that it was a stumbling block to some but the power of God to others. 1 Corinthians Chapter One goes into great depth contrasting the wisdom of man and the Good News of Jesus Christ. And Paul comes to this conclusion (1 Corinthians 1:25):

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Paul then goes on to discuss how God uses the foolish and base things of the world to confound the wise. There is no power in man's wisdom or strength. But there is in the Gospel.

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

So what is it that makes the Gospel so “powerful?”

We have discussed this word *power* before. It is *dunamis* in the Greek. We get our word *dynamite* from it. And that is exactly the thought here.

The Gospel is explosive. It comes from the very omnipotence or all powerfulness of God. Think about it this way:

If God had the power to create, don't you think He has the power to change?

Of course, He does.

And here is the truth: All men want to change.

That is the point behind all advertising. They offer you something that will help you look better, feel better, think better, or have better experiences. And the things of the world can change the outside of men and women. But they can't change the heart. In Jeremiah 13:23 the prophet asks these questions:

**Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?
Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.**

You have a better chance of changing your skin color than you do of renewing your own heart. And that is at the heart (pun intended) of the problem.

Sinful man has a dead spirit and a hardened heart.

Men try all kinds of things to overcome this problem. They try religion with its rituals and regulations. They try doing good works.

But the Bible says that none of this can save. Paul made this clear in Ephesians 1:19-20 when he wrote:

¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places

Only the power of God can save people. There is no other way. Later in chapter 5 verse 6 of Romans, Paul will build on this thought by writing:

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Then, in 1 Peter 1:3-5 we are told this:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The power of God is what the Holy Spirit used not only in creation, but also in resurrection and salvation. Jesus was brought back to life by the power of God, and so were we. But not only that happened.

We are also kept by that power “through faith for salvation.” Remember that as we move along in our study.

God’s power can do what man cannot do for himself. That is the basic principle of the Gospel. Man is sinful and unable to remedy his condition. But God... Only God is all powerful. And only God can save.

So what is this salvation that can only come by the power of God?

And why does man need it?

Ephesians 2:1-3 gives us a good understanding of this need. Paul writes:

¹And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins,² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Men are dead. But the salvation act of God makes them alive. The Gospel delivers sinners from the penalty, punishment and power of sin. And this “salvation” God offers is so important that Paul uses the word 18 times in his epistles and five times in Romans. He uses the verb form even more, 29 times in his letters and eight times in Romans.

Now some think that using this term, “saved,” is outdated. But I think it is a wonderful word — *God’s Word*. Man needs to be saved, and he cannot do it by himself. Only the Gospel of Christ has the power to do that. But the thing we need to understand is that salvation, like the Gospel, is much more than just a momentary thing. In fact, there is a past, present and future to our salvation.

What you talkin’ about, Willis?

When you got saved, you were delivered from the darkness of sin and brought into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love (Colossians 1). But not only that, you were also

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3). So your future salvation is secure. But Paul also tells us this in Philippians 2:12-13:

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

Notice that Paul says to work out your salvation, not to work on it.

It is like going to a spiritual gym. We have to get trained up by the power (there is that word again) of the Holy Spirit. This means that we need to step aside and let God go to work in us.

You see, the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to those who believe — not to those who behave. God does not ask men to behave a certain way to be saved. He asks them to trust in His work for their salvation. Look at how Paul finishes verse 16:

for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Historically, the Gospel message went first to the Jew and then to the Greek (or Gentiles). Jesus told His disciples to take His message to the lost sheep of Israel. Then, when He was speaking to them just before He was taken to heaven, He told them to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. That gave them the power to preach the Gospel.

And then He said to take the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the world. We live in the time when the Gospel is going out to all the world. And it is available to anyone and everyone who believes.

But what is this Gospel that man needs to believe in?

Where do you think the most concise explanation of the Gospel is found in the Bible?

1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Paul writes:

¹Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.

³For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures

That is simple enough. But here is the question:

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

Since God is infinitely holy, how can He save sinners and receive them into His presence based solely on what they believe?

We have talked about this before. The Bible says that even the demons believe, and they tremble.

So how does God do it?

It has to do with what is here called the “righteousness of God.” Look at verse 17:

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

The word *righteousness* is used in over 60 times in Romans. There are basically three ways in which it is used:

1. First, it is used to describe the attribute of God by which He always does what is right, just, proper and consistent with His nature. By definition, *God is righteous*.
2. Second, the *righteousness of God* refers to the method by which He saves ungodly sinners. Men are not righteous.
3. Third, it refers to the perfect standing which God provides for those who believe on Jesus. Because *God is righteous*, He is able to save ungodly sinners and give them right standing before Him. And He can do this without violating His holiness or any other attribute of His nature.

Are you with me?

But how He does this, how He “reveals” His righteousness, is from “faith to faith.” That means the way God saves sinners is by faith from beginning to end. Our salvation begins with faith when we trust in His righteousness to save us and not our own. And then it continues by faith as we trust that He who began a good work in us will complete it.

It is a matter of belief and not behavior. Works never comes into the picture.

So that begs the question, “What is faith?”

Faith, as we just said, *is believing*. We all live by faith every day of our lives. We have faith that if we turn on the faucet, water will come out. That is faith. You don’t know if your pipes have frozen or the well has run dry. You just believe that if you turn the knob, you get cold liquid to drink. You also have faith that, when the light turns green, you can go through the intersection safely. But what happens if the other guy doesn’t believe that? A collision might occur.

We live by faith every day.

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

Faith is trust.

But faith in the spiritual dimension is far different from that kind of faith, although it operates in much the same way.

This kind of faith is trusting and believing what we have just read in verse 16 is true. We have to trust, to have faith, that the power of God can and will save those who believe.

Believe what?

What we read in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 — *the Gospel*.

Later in Romans Paul will tell us this (Romans 10:9):

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

That is saving faith.

Salvation is not professing Christianity. Even the Mormons and other cults claim to be “Christian.”

Salvation is not baptism. Lots of religions have a baptismal ceremony of one kind or another.

It is not moral reform. In fact, you don’t need to clean up your act to get saved. But your act will get cleaned up if you are.

Salvation is not going to church — although you should.

It is not conforming to the rules. But if you are saved, I would have to ask you why you are not.

Salvation is not self-discipline, although it does give you the power to have this fruit.

It is not morality. But it should change your moral compass.

So many people think they are saved for the wrong reasons. But here is the truth about salvation:

It comes because a man or woman recognizes that he or she is lost and has no resources to save themselves. It comes when one sees the filthiness and deformity of their sin. Then, and only then, will they see their need for a Savior. That is when they will be drawn to Christ.

Then they will be able to see the One who died for their sin — who conquered sin and death.

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

Then will they trust that He alone can pay the price they cannot afford and come to Him in search of a new life.

And that is why Paul finished this wonderful section by saying this:

The just shall live by faith.

So here we have one more word to add to our discourse — *just*, or *justified*, or *justification*.

William Barclay explains the meaning of this word which is *diakoo* in the Greek. By the way, it is the root word for *righteousness*. Listen to what Barclay says:

All verbs in Greek which end in oo... always mean to treat, or account or reckon a person as something. If God justifies a sinner, it does not mean that he finds reasons to prove that he was right - far from it. It does not even mean, at this point, that he makes the sinner a good man. It means that God treats the sinner as if he had not been a sinner at all.

So *justification* literally means *just as if you had never sinned*. It is the act of God by which he declares a believing sinner as righteous. A paraphrase for this part of verse 17 could be, “Justification by faith is how God saves sinners and remains holy.” Isn’t that wonderful!

Later in Romans we are going to see Paul use a banking metaphor to explain this act in detail. He will tell us that when a sinner comes to Christ, God puts His righteousness on their account in heaven. He credits them with His righteousness, while cancelling all their sin. And that is so important to understand.

In Romans we will learn that no man is righteous or can ever become righteous by behaving in a certain way. The only way to become right (or *just*) in God’s eyes is for Him to declare you righteous. And the only way He can do this is for you to believe in Jesus the God/man.

So let’s close by looking at the four places “the just shall live by faith” appears in the Bible.

Who can tell me?

Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38.

My mentor, Chuck Missler, always said that what we have here is a trilogy, built on the Habakkuk passage.

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

Like in Paul's day (and ours), things looked bleak for God's people. The Jews were trusting in everything but God to save them from their oppressors. But what they needed to do was to live by faith — to trust God to save them.

That is what Paul draws on here and in Galatians and Hebrews. (And I do believe that Paul wrote Hebrews.) This is how it works:

In Romans, Paul tells us all about the *just*, who the *just* are.

In Galatians, he tells us how the *just* "shall live."

And then in Hebrews, he tells us that the *just* shall live "by faith."

We will draw on this as we move along in our study.

But the thing we need to understand is this is no new message created by Paul or Jesus in the first century. It is God's plan of salvation from the beginning. E. Stanley Jones put it this way:

*Religions are man's search for God; the gospel is God's search for man.
There are many religions, but one gospel.*

Next time we are going to begin looking at another attribute of God — *His wrath*. Read ahead and pray for the Lord to speak to you about this subject that most of the church tends to shove aside. We are not going to.

Let's pray.