

“THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 1:16-17

Introduction.

Every single commentator on the book of Romans calls verses 16-17 the heart of the entire book. Here Paul announces his grand theme that will occupy his attention for the rest of Romans. Romans is Paul's clearest exposition of the Gospel of God, and these two verses give the heart of Paul's ministry as an apostle. This is Romans in a nutshell, and the summary of the Bible.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel.

Why does Paul start off saying he is not ashamed of the Gospel? Because there are plenty of reason to be ashamed of the Gospel. The Gospel is a scandal of weakness and folly.

The founder was killed as a criminal on a Roman cross, cursed.

God was so weak and powerless He couldn't keep His Son from being killed.

The message of the Gospel is too simple, nothing especially intellectual.

It doesn't rise to the level of the great philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

Calling people sinners certainly isn't popular, that gets downplayed in our day.

God's method of salvation is crazy, insane. No one would ever dream up that plan.

A resurrection, are you kidding me, everyone knows no one comes back from the dead.

The followers of the Gospel were lowly, fishermen, shepherds, not the noble and elite.

The Gospel was regarded with contempt by the educated, the sophisticated.

Today the Gospel is unacceptable because it flies in the face of our independence, our self-reliance. The Gospel strips us of our pride, our boasting, our wisdom. No other religion stirs up the shame and guilt of our sinfulness. No other religion is as offensive to man's pride.

For all these reasons the Gospel was ridiculed, mocked and spoken against everywhere it went.

Paul is coming to preach the Gospel and he wants to prepare the Romans for the reproach they will receive for believing the Gospel, for lifting up the cross of Jesus. A crucified Savior was a stumbling block to Jews and utter nonsense to the Greeks.

Paul knows all about the ridicule and mocking, all the ways the ungodly oppose the Gospel. Paul was willing to be shamed for the Gospel because he was not ashamed of the Gospel.

Galatians 6:14 Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

I am not ashamed of gospel.

It is the power of God for salvation.

Why is Paul not ashamed of the Gospel?

Last week's text ended with Paul saying he was eager to preach the Gospel to the Romans. This week we learn why, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.

The shame disappears when you realize the power of the Gospel is the very power of God put on display for everyone to see in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul was not ashamed to say the Gospel is the only power in the world that can save us. Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, secularism don't have a savior, so they have no power. The Gospel is the only truth in the world that can really save people forever.

This is the secret to no shame. There is no shame in the most powerful thing, the only thing that can save a soul.

The Greek word for power here is *dunamis*, from which we get our word dynamite. But it is really a power more like nuclear power, it is an unharnessable power.

Remember when the US dropped those two nuclear bombs on Japan, remember what happened? The proudest nation with the proudest military in the world was humiliated into signing an unconditional surrender in front of General MacArthur.

There is no more powerful moment in history, than Christ naked, bleeding, dying, submitted to open shame, overcoming every other power in the world, sin, death, hell and Satan.

Ephesians 1:19-20 ... the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

The power of the Gospel is compared to the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Why does this power have to be so great? It has to be powerful enough to overcome all my pride, my sin, my weakness. Only the power of God can make us despair of our sin, hate what we have done. He must raise us from death, from the grave, from our lust, greed, selfishness, pride.

We men are a proud bunch. We think we are better than everyone else, we think we can drive better than everyone else, do what we do better. And we hate being humbled or humiliated. When it comes to our salvation we want to bring something to the table, we want to bring something to God to make us look good or acceptable.

The Gospel power kills that, it makes us humble ourselves in the face of our sin and unconditionally surrender ourselves to Jesus.

We are completely impotent to save ourselves. There is no other power and there is no other salvation. It may be utter foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those that believe it is the very power of God. To reject this salvation is to cut yourself off from all hope.

It is the power of God to change hearts, to overcome stubborn wills, to forgive sin, to save souls, to topple kingdoms and destroy principalities and powers and the dominion of Satan himself.

When we consider the length God went to, the power He exerted on our behalf, we should be all in and see it as cause for worship, cause to sing louder and more zealously and forget ourselves.

To everyone who believes.

Everyone. The Gospel is freely offered to absolutely everyone for their salvation. It is universal.

Regardless of age, sex, condition, birth, country, education, ability. The Gospel is without regard to status, it is the great leveler, all are the same before it. It is offered to all, but it is power only to those who believe. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Do you know what is the most dangerous thing you can do on earth? Live this life without the Gospel. To reject the Gospel is to reject all hope, it is to reject life itself.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed

This is one of the most important sentences in one of the most important books in the Bible.

Notice what Paul doesn't say, what most people today think it should say.

We think the Gospel reveals the love of God. Actually it does, but it not the weak, anemic kind of love most people think of, basically just God being nice. That kind of love can't sweep our unrighteousness away. God loves His righteousness, holiness, truth, justice, and God's love can't be unfaithful to who He is.

Our problem is the holy wrath of God against all unrighteousness and sin. Our unrighteousness is what separates us from God and that has to be dealt with. It is God's righteousness that rescues us from our unrighteousness, by giving us the righteousness we don't have.

II Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Righteousness is on the one hand a personal attribute of God, being morally right and without sin. On the other hand, it is what God imputes to us for our justification.

The righteousness of God does what all human righteousness can't do, what human righteousness is powerless to do. In fact worse, human righteousness makes us hostile to God, an enemy opposed to God.

Do you know how far the righteousness of God is from the righteousness of man? Do you know what the distance is between self-righteousness and God's righteousness, between human goodness and God's goodness? It is the distance between heaven and hell, it is infinite.

When human self-righteousness stands before the righteous Judge of the universe, God will simply ask, "Why did you reject my Son, why did you not believe in the Gospel I offered you for your eternal salvation?"

You remember Paul thought he was the most righteous man alive, and you know what, he may have come as close as anyone ever did. What conclusion did Paul come to?

Philippians 3:8-9 I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Do you know who has the most trouble believing the Gospel? Good people, respectable people, intelligent, hardworking, upright model citizens. They don't need it, they are good enough. They aren't like those other poor sinners who need a crutch.

"I have got this, I am good, I can figure it out, I don't need to depend on someone else. I don't need to pray, I don't need to confess anything, my righteousness is good enough, certainly better than a lot of other people I know, certainly better than those hypocrites who go to church."

Who are you trusting in, yourself, your goodness, your righteousness, or the righteousness revealed by God and given to us through faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ?

For the rest of chapter one and chapter two and half of chapter three Paul is going to crush that false thinking. The whole book of Romans will say over and over, nothing in my hands I bring. My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

From faith to faith

By faith to faith. Not from works to faith. This is an intensified phrase, meaning entirely by faith. It starts with faith, it is lived by faith, it ends with faith. First, last and always. Beginning, middle and end.

The entire Christian life is lived by faith. It doesn't just start with faith, but it continues everyday by faith.

Our trouble comes when we try to live the Christian life in a way different than how we received Jesus. We received Jesus not by trying or effort, by grace, so let us learn to continue to live by grace. In other words, the Christian life should be like being born again every day.

Colossians 2:6-7 Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Every morning when you wake up, what do you think about? Your work, the struggles, the challenges. Do you have feelings of inadequacy, doubt, fear, anxiety, guilt, questions about the future? Every morning we face a new day of fighting for faith, preaching the Gospel to ourselves.

Say to yourself: "I don't have to earn God's acceptance or forgiveness or favor. I can live in faith and obedience because I have already been forgiven, I have already received the righteousness of God, I already have His power at work in me.

As it is written: "The righteous shall live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 ... *but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

As it is written, the Gospel is not some new, novel thing. It is not a first century invention. Habakkuk preached the Gospel, the righteous will live by faith.

Just as our DNA is written into almost all our cells, so the Gospel is written into almost every verse in the Bible. The DNA of the Bible is the good news of the Gospel.

This is the verse that saved Martin Luther and unleashed the Reformation. The shot heard around the world.

He read the righteousness of God as the high and holy standard that he had to work for to make himself acceptable to God, but no matter how hard or high or fast, all he achieved was despair.

Finally, one night came the breakthrough, this righteousness was not the standard, it was the gift of God to those who believed, God justifies us by faith. He read for the first time with fresh understanding, Romans 1:17. There it was, the righteous shall live by faith. This righteousness was not demanded by God from us, but a gift from God to us. In that moment he said,

“Through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before ‘the righteousness of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven.”

Implications and application.

May you never be ashamed of the Gospel, may you know the power of the Gospel in your daily life and may you have the same eagerness as Paul to share it.

May you have a desire to make much of Jesus, and to support the making much of Jesus wherever you can, financially, prayerfully, with your personal presence.

May you feed your faith by preaching the Gospel to yourself each day and being reminded of it's power in verses like Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

May you know and trust the power of the Gospel to give you victory over temptation and pride, greed and lust, over every obstacle to your joy. May you be set free from all do better, be better, try harder living. Whatever it costs, without shame stand for the Gospel, cling to it, believe on it, feed on it, fight the good fight of faith, and its power will save you and refresh you.

Sink your teeth into Romans, read it, reflect on it, pray for the Spirit to open your heart and apply it. Make real work of this the way Martin Luther and so many others have to the benefit of their souls.