

Not Ashamed Of The Gospel

Romans 1:14-17

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In Romans 1:14-17, Paul said, “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For 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” or “the Gentiles.” “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

With this text, we come to the end of Paul’s preface to the book of Romans. In it we discovered the theme of the epistle to the Romans, and we see the essence of Christianity. It is viewed as one of the great texts of the Scriptures, and it tells us how we can be right before God.

The statement “how we can be right before God” is seen most in verse 17. But the questions are, “How can a righteous God make unrighteous man righteous and still maintain His righteousness? How does a righteous God justify or declare righteous an unrighteous, wicked, sinful man and do it in a way that maintains His righteousness?” In other words, God doesn’t become unjust or unrighteous in actually giving us righteousness and declaring us righteous before Him. How does He do that? That’s what the book of Romans is all about; how God saves sinners.

in verse 14 he said, “I am a debtor”; in verse 15 he said, “I am ready”; and in verse 16 he said, “I am not ashamed.” These are my three, main points, and we will look at them one by one.

First, in verse 14, we see Paul’s burden for lost souls; he sees himself as a “debtor.” He said, “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.” In what sense is Paul “a debtor”? When you buy a house, you have a mortgage. When you buy a car, you have a loan—in fact you have to sell your house to buy a car! When you put too much money on your credit card, you’re a debtor. That’s not what Paul is talking about. He didn’t charge up his Visa card, and now he’s in trouble. Nor is Paul saying that this debt was a condition that he needed to fulfill in order to be saved. He’s not trying to “save” himself or work for his salvation.

Rather, Paul is speaking about his obligation. The word “debtor” here means “obligation.” He had an obligation; he was indebted or obligated. If someone gave you money to give to someone else, you are obligated to give the other person that money. So you become a debtor to the person who entrusted the money to you, and you become a debtor to the person you give the money to.

God has given us the Gospel. He has given us the good news about Jesus Christ. And we are obligated to give it to others who need to hear the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we have a debt or obligation to tell others about the Gospel. This text is a powerful lesson in the importance of our responsibility before God and others to tell them the

good news about Jesus Christ. Christians are obligated to pay that debt to the unbelieving world. God has entrusted us to spread the Gospel.

Who is Paul a debtor to? Verse 14, “both to Greeks and to barbarians.” The Greeks are those who speak the Greek language, the Greek people, and barbarians are anyone, any race, that doesn’t speak Greek. They just speak “bar-bar,” from which we get “barbarians.” It’s a transliteration of “bar-bar”; it’s just gibberish. The “wise” would be the Greeks, and the “unwise” would be the barbarians. So Paul is saying the same thing two, different ways: the Greeks are wise and the barbarians are the unwise. They believed that anyone who didn’t speak Greek was a barbarian.

To the Greeks, there were only two kinds of people: there were Greeks and there were barbarians. To the Jews, there were only two kinds of people: there were Jews and there were Gentiles. To God, there are only two kinds of people: there are saved and there are unsaved or born again and not born again or those going to heaven and those going to hell. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are of your father, the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (John 8:44).

So you’re either saved and going to heaven, or you’re not saved and going to hell. Some of you are going to heaven, and some of you are on your way to hell. If you were to die right now, you wouldn’t go to heaven, because you’re not saved.

“What do you mean by ‘saved’?” We’ll get it in our text. The Gospel is the message of how God saves sinners, how God makes unrighteous people righteous, or how God makes us acceptable to Him through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, which is actually the theme of the entire book of Romans.

As far as there being two kinds of people, in 1 John 5:12 it says, “He who has the Son has life...” those are the saved “...he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Either you have Jesus living in your heart—you’re saved and you have life—or you don’t have Jesus living in your heart—you’re not saved and you don’t have life.

So we are in debt to tell others about Jesus. Vance Havner said, “The Gospel is not a secret to be hoarded, but it is a story to be heralded. Too many Christians are stuffing themselves with Gospel blessings, while millions have never had a taste.”

Can you imagine if you could find a cure for cancer?! You turn the TV on, and there is an announcement, “They’ve found the cure for cancer! No one has to have cancer any longer! You can be cured of all kinds of cancer!” Would you keep that a secret? You’d tell everybody! You’d be blasting it to everyone you could!

We have the cure for man’s greatest problem—sin. The Bible says, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20). Beginning in verse 18, we will get into the message of the book, and we will see that all of humanity is guilty before God and, as such, all are subject to the wrath of God. And they are even experiencing God’s wrath right now. So that will be the section on

condemnation and the wrath of God revealed. But in the Gospel, salvation and righteousness is revealed, for God is able, through the blood of Jesus Christ, to forgive our sins, to justify us, to reconcile us back to God, to give us right standing before Him and we are accepted by God.

So we, as Christians, are just beggars telling other beggars where we have found bread. We need to have a burden for the lost. Are you a debtor?

Second, Paul's boldness is seen in the statement, "I am ready." Verse 15, "So, as much as is in me..." which is a fancy way of saying, "with all my abilities" "...I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also." Paul had already been preaching the Gospel for 30 years. And because he preached the Gospel, he had been arrested, been beaten, been stoned, thrown into prison, been shipwrecked, been in all kinds of persecution and opposition, yet after all those years of preaching, he said, "I am eager to preach the Gospel."

The word "ready," in verse 15, doesn't mean "prepared"; it means "eager." We would say, "I'm amped!" or "I'm pumped!" or "I'm ready to go! I want to preach the Gospel! I'm ready to share the good news of Jesus Christ!"

The question is, "What is the Gospel?" referring to verse 15. The Gospel is good news about Jesus Christ. It's not good views. The Gospel is good news, not good views. It's not ideas, not thoughts, not theories, not a philosophy, not a religion; it's a history of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. If you take Jesus out of the picture, you don't have the good news. Without Jesus, there is no good news. The only good news we have to offer people is Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

Jesus died for your sins. You can't have the Gospel without understanding why you need the Gospel—it's because we're sinners. And our sins have to be forgiven. So Jesus substituted Himself on the Cross for you and me. He didn't just die to show us how much He loved us. He didn't just die to give us an example of self-sacrifice. He didn't just die to show us He cared. He actually died to pay the penalty for our sins.

It's so important for you to understand that the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross was a substitutionary death for you and me as sinners. It was a vicarious taking-of-my-place and paying my penalty on the Cross. It was a penal substitution; God the Father punished Christ, poured out His wrath upon Him in our place. What love, what grace, what mercy! "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). We will get that again in verse 17, where it says, "The righteousness of God is revealed."

So the Gospel is the good news about Jesus. It's not a creed, it's not a code of conduct, it's not a ceremony; it's Christ. If you start preaching creeds to people, if you start giving them a code of conduct, if you say you just have to be baptized, if you say you have to be confirmed, if you say you have to go to catechism, if you say you have to do good things, you're not giving them the Gospel. You're not giving them the good news about Jesus Christ. Jesus is the heart, the center and the focus of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Third, Paul said, in verses 16-17, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Earlier he said he was a debtor and he was ready. Now he said that he was "not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Why? "For it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Paul also was not ashamed "For in it..." that is, "the Gospel" "...the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

I'm sure that Paul, being persecuted as he was, was tempted to be ashamed of the Gospel. He had to go to Rome, which was the center and capital of the mighty Roman Empire. It was like the intellectual capital of the world at that time.

Jesus said, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). If you are ashamed of Jesus, He would be ashamed of you.

The reason Paul was ready to preach the Gospel is in verse 16: "I am not ashamed." Notice how it breaks down. I think it's fascinating. He said, "I am ready," verse 15. And the reason he was ready was because he was "not ashamed," verse 16. And he also knew that it was God's power to bring salvation, verse 16, and that God's righteousness was revealed in it, verse 17. So we see the word "for" three times—twice in verse 16 and once in verse 17. So the reason Paul was ready to preach the Gospel was that he was "not ashamed."

"I am not ashamed" is a figure of speech, which means that he was glorying in the Gospel; that he counted it a high honor and privilege to be a preacher of the Gospel and that he had great confidence in it. Why was Paul not ashamed of the Gospel? Because it was God's power for salvation, and "in it the righteousness of God is revealed."

Now I want to give you five things Paul believed about the Gospel that helped him not to be ashamed of it. It helped him to be ready and to see himself as a debtor. Number one, he believed in its source. It was "the power of God." We should believe the same. The Gospel comes from God and is God's power. The only power to change men's hearts is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The word "power" is the Greek word "dunamis." We get our words "dynamite, dynamo, dynamic" from it. So the power of God is in the Gospel message. Life can be changed. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new."

Maybe you have experienced that. You used to love some things; now that you're a Christian, you hate them. The things you used to hate, now you love. Your life has been transformed.

I got saved right out of high school at 18 years old. All my friends were freaking out. "What happened to John Miller?! He's a Christian now! He got religious now!" I think, Where would I be if I had not gotten saved? Probably in prison with them. Many of my former friends are now in prison. Thank God for the power of the Gospel, how it changes your life!

Where would you be today if you hadn't found Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? You'd still be groping in the darkness, in the emptiness and living in sin and in bondage. The power of the Gospel comes from God.

Number two, Paul believed in its purpose: it brought salvation, verse 16. Jesus came to save us from our sins. If you listen to and watch some radio and TV preachers, you'd think that Jesus came to make us rich. Some of them brag about that. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (Matthew 8:9). That means spiritually rich.

So He didn't come to make us rich. He didn't come to make us wealthy or healthy. He came to save us from sin. That is why He was named Jesus, which means "He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Let me give you three aspects of our salvation. First, we are saved from sin's penalty. This is our past penalty. Jesus paid our penalty on the Cross. Second, we are saved from sin's power. That's our present in living the Christian life. He delivers us from the power and grip of sin. Third, we will be saved from sin's presence in the future. We have been saved—we have been justified; we are being saved—we are being sanctified; and we will be saved—when we are glorified in heaven. So it's the past penalty of sin, the present power of sin and one day when I'm glorified, I'll be free from the very presence of sin altogether.

As Christians, when we get to heaven, we don't have to worry about sin anymore. That'll be awesome! We won't have to worry about sickness anymore. That'll be super awesome! We won't have to worry about Satan anymore! That's what salvation means. Saved from sin's penalty, saved from sin's power and saved from sin's presence. Jesus came to save us from sin. That's what the good news is. That's the Gospel we need to share.

Number three, Paul believed in its scope, verse 16: it is "for everyone." The phrase "for everyone" means "to wise and to unwise," verse 14, and "for the Jew first and also for the Greek," verse 16.

Nicodemus, in John 3, was a Jew, a Pharisee, a teacher of the law, yet Jesus told him that he wouldn't get to heaven unless he was born again. If anyone could get to heaven by their religion, by their race or by their good deeds it would have been Nicodemus. But Jesus said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

And if anyone could have gotten to heaven, it would have been Saul of Tarsus. He was a Jew, a Pharisee, as far as the law was concerned, he was blameless, he was of the tribe of Benjamin,

he was a Hebrew following Hebrew culture, yet he said, "I don't want my own righteousness which is of the law. I want a righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:5-9).

The only way to get to heaven is by coming with your hands empty; not pleading any great work of your own. Then it is accepting by faith the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We will see in verse 17 that it is by faith. You must believe and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world..." so it's to everyone "...that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Number four, Paul believed in its reception, verse 16. And this is so important. The Gospel is "for everyone who believes," not "behaves." He didn't say it was everyone who behaves. Again, John 3:16 says, "That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

"You mean all I have to do is believe in Jesus?!" Yes. What does it mean to "believe in Jesus"? It doesn't just mean to believe intellectually that He exists; it means that you trust Him, you commit your life to Jesus Christ. You believe in Him by putting your faith and trust in Him. How marvelous! The reception of that is believing.

Number five, Paul believed in its revelation, verse 17. In the Gospel, we have a revelation of "the righteousness of God." This is one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. I will admit, as a preacher, pastor and Bible teacher for many years, that it is one of the hardest to explain and put into words.

"For in it," in the context, is referring to the Gospel, to the good news about Jesus Christ, to the good news about salvation, to the good news "for everyone who believes," that God's righteousness "is revealed from faith to faith." That's a fancy way of saying, I believe, that it starts with faith, continues with faith and ends with faith. It is faith from beginning to end. "As it is written..." quoting from the Old Testament book in Habakkuk 2:4 "... 'The just shall live by faith.'"

Paul is trying to show the believers in Rome that this is not some new idea or novelty. Rather it is something that 600 years earlier Habakkuk actually said: "The just..." referring to the righteous "...shall live..." referring to salvation "...by faith." It's "by faith" and not by good works or good deeds. It's by believing and trusting in Jesus Christ.

God takes the righteousness of Christ and gives it to the believing sinner, so that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to you. Your sins are paid for by Jesus on the Cross, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to you. You do an exchange. This is what's called "positional righteousness" or your standing before God. It is also called "justification."

The whole book of Romans is going to be an explanation of verse 17; how a righteous God takes unrighteous man and makes him righteous, yet still maintaining His righteousness. How does He do that? By the Cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus paid for our sin, so He could save us from sin by imputing to us His righteousness. The righteousness of God is His justification of the unjust. It is His righteous way of pronouncing the unrighteous righteous. He does that

through the death, burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

There are three things I want to say by way of application. First, when it comes to the Gospel, we must believe it. We must believe and receive Jesus Christ. Second, we should live the Gospel. We should live our lives as witnesses to the power of the Gospel by walking in God's holiness and righteousness. That doesn't mean sinless; it means sinning less and less as we grow in grace. Third, we must share the Gospel. We must realize we are debtors or under obligation. We must realize we need to be ready, eager to preach. We should not be ashamed of the Gospel.

The Gospel of Christ is the sweetest music ever heard on earth. It is the most powerful message proclaimed among men. It is the most precious treasure entrusted to the people of God.