

Not Ashamed Of The Gospel

Romans 1:14-17

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In Romans 1:14-17, Paul said, "I am a debtor..." or "under obligation" "...both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me..." or "with the ability that I have" "...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. For in it..." that is, "in this Gospel message" "...the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" In the Gospel we can learn how God makes unrighteous men righteous. He had quoted here from Habakkuk 2:4.

Our text is no doubt the most important in Paul's letter to the Romans, and perhaps in all of literature. In the book of Romans, Paul tells us how the unrighteous can be made righteous, how the lost can be found, how the unsaved can be saved through the power of the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How? The answer is in verse 17: by "faith." It is also referred to, in verse 16, by believing. So we believe; we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, and a righteous God makes unrighteous man righteous through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Paul calls this "the gospel" in verses 15 and 16.

Now we see three, strong, personal statements that Paul makes in his desire to preach this Gospel. First, in verse 14, he says, "I am a debtor" or "I am under obligation." Paul was burdened. Second, in verse 15, he says, "I am ready" or "eager." And third, in verse 16, "I am not ashamed." This last one is a figure of speech, which presents a backward way of saying that "I glory" or "I boast." He's actually saying, "I glory in" or "I boast about the Gospel."

I want to look at Paul's relationship to the Gospel, and to ours as well. First, we see Paul's burden, in verse 14, in the statement, "I am a debtor." It was Paul's burden. "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise."

What does Paul mean by being "a debtor"? Let me tell you what he doesn't mean. He doesn't mean that he put too much on his credit card. With the interest rates like they are right now, it's a dangerous thing to do. Even though they're starting to creep down, you don't want to become debtors. The Bible says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another" (Romans 13:8).

He's not talking about financial debt; he's talking about a moral debt or obligation. As a believer in Jesus Christ who has been forgiven of his sins, he needs to share the good news with others, because they're not saved and are on their way to hell. If they don't believe in Christ and repent, they're going to be lost.

So Paul is in debt because he had been saved and knew the good news. He is thus under obligation. We as Christians are in debt because God has entrusted us with the Gospel. He has given us salvation, which we need to share with others.

How can we hold back when God has saved us by His grace, and we know we're going to heaven when others are lost and on their way to hell?

Who is Paul in debt to? He mentions them in verse 14: "to Greeks and to barbarians" and "to wise and to unwise." Under Alexander the Great, the world of the Roman Empire had been Hellenized; they were following Greek culture. So where it says "Greeks" here, it is not an ethnicity; it is a culture. He is talking about upper-class, cultured individuals. "The barbarians" is the lower-class, uncultured people.

The word "barbarian" is interesting, because in the Roman Empire almost everyone spoke Greek. But those who didn't speak Greek were referred to as "barbarians." Why? The transliteration is taken from the word in the Greek that sounds like what it conveys: "barbar" or gibberish. When they heard someone speak a language other than the Greek language, it sounded like "bar bar bar" or gibberish to them.

My son actually speaks, reads and writes Mandarin Chinese. It's amazing. And whenever he speaks in Mandarin Chinese, to me it sounds like "blah blah blah." It sounds like gibberish. And when he writes it out, I can't believe it. "That means something?!" Yes.

So in the Greek world, there were Greeks following Greek culture, and there were the barbarians who spoke a different language.

The "wise" and "unwise" could again be referring to the "Greeks" and the "barbarians," so it's just a repetition or saying it another way. Or it could be conveying those who are educated and those who are uneducated. That's probably what he's conveying here. So the Gospel is universal; it's for everyone.

Paul was eager or a debtor to preach the Gospel. The point for us is that we should have eagerness and a sense of debt to share the good news with others, who need to know about Jesus Christ.

There is a story in 2 Kings 7 that kind of illustrates this. There were four leprous men, who were outside Jerusalem when it was under siege by the Syrians during the ministry of Elisha the prophet. They were thinking that if they went back to Jerusalem, which wasn't allowed because of their leprosy, the people there were dying of starvation. So they would die there. But if they remained outside the city and did nothing, they would die. So why not venture over to the enemy's camp to see if they would have mercy on them and feed them, take them captive but spare their lives? They had nothing to lose; they would die if they did nothing.

So they gave it a shot and headed to the Syrians' camp. But they found it deserted. The Syrians had fled, because God had caused a loud sound in the night of a coming army. It was a miracle; the Syrians ran out of the tents and fled, leaving everything behind. They left food, their clothes, their money and loot. The four lepers thought it was awesome! They ate to their hearts' content and stuffed their pockets with loot and buried some in holes.

Then they thought that if they didn't tell the inhabitants of Jerusalem about this good find, something bad might happen to them. So they went back to Jerusalem and told them about the food, the clothes and goods of the Syrians. The people of Jerusalem didn't believe it, so they sent spies out to the Syrian camp. They found out indeed it was true. So the people flooded out of the city and ate to their hearts' content.

So the good news was they all were saved. And the picture here that they had found food and had previously been starving is that we should share with others the good news. Someone said, "We as sinners are beggars telling other beggars where we have found bread." When we share the Gospel as Christians, we are "beggars telling other beggars where we found bread." Vance Havner said, "The Gospel is not a secret to be hoarded but a story to be heralded. Too many Christians are stuffing themselves with Gospel blessings while millions have never had a taste." So pray and say, "God, give me a burden for the lost."

The Greeks saw everyone as either Greek or barbarian. The Jews saw everyone as either Jewish or Gentile. God sees everyone as either saved or unsaved. There is no third group. You're either on your way to heaven, which is the narrow road through the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14), or you're on your way to hell, which is the broad road through the broad gate, and "There are many who go in by it." 1 John 5:12 says, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." It's that simple; you're either saved, and you're on your way to heaven, or you're lost, and you're on your way to hell. There's no in-between.

You're either going to heaven or hell; which is it? You need to make sure you're right with God, that you've been forgiven, so that when you die or the Lord returns, you're ready to see the Lord face-to-face. As Paul was burdened, so are we. Ask God to give you a love for the lost and be burdened to share with them.

Second, Paul said, "I am ready," verse 15. He said, "So as much as is in me, I am ready to preach..." the word is "kérussó," which means "to herald" or "to proclaim" "...the Gospel to you who are in Rome also." Paul was eager to pay the debt. The word "ready" could convey the idea of "eager." It doesn't mean he was prepped or prepared; it means he had an attitude or desire. He was like a racehorse at the gate, ready to take off down the track. He was ready to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now I want to answer the question, "What is the Gospel?" We hear the word "Gospel," but do we really know what the Gospel is? That's very important to know and understand what it is.

The word "Gospel" basically means "good news." And it is the good news about Jesus Christ. It's not good views, it's not good opinions, it's not good ideas from man; it's good news about Jesus Christ that is rooted in historical fact. The Gospel is not a creed; the Gospel is not a code of conduct—do this and you shall live; the Gospel is not a ceremony—be baptized, take communion, be confirmed, and you'll go to heaven. The Gospel is about a person, and that person is Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul gives us the classic definition of the essence of the Gospel, the good news. “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...” this is so important, because it’s how we 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.”

This may seem elementary and basic to many, but it’s important to go back to basics. It is simple but not simplistic. We’re going to see in our text, in Romans 1:17, that in the Gospel is “the righteousness of God...revealed.” The Gospel reveals the love of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the faithfulness of God and the righteousness of God. All the attributes of God are demonstrated in the Cross of Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel rests on three, historic facts. In 1 Corinthians 15, the first one is that “Christ died for our sins,” verse 3. You can’t have the good news until you first hear the bad news, that we are sinners. The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). Sin separates us from God, because Adam and Eve fell or sinned in the garden of Eden. As a result, we are born in sin, separated from God. We commit sins of disobedience against God, because we are born with a sinful, rebellious nature. We’re enemies with God. We’re strangers and need to be reconciled to God. That’s all the Gospel, how God saves us by faith in Jesus Christ and reconciles us from sin back to the Savior, Jesus.

The number one focus is that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” This is what is known as the “substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.” He died in my place. He took my penalty. When Jesus was on the Cross, He cried, “Tatelestai!” which means, “It is finished!” or “Paid in full!” He took His righteousness and gave it to me. Theologians call it “imputation.” He gives that righteousness to me and takes my sin upon Himself on the Cross and pays its penalty, which is death. He died for my sin. He was the perfect substitute, because He was the sinless Son of God. So Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, came from heaven, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and died a substitutionary death.

But basically, all you need to know to preach the Gospel is that Jesus died for your sins. That’s why you don’t have to work to get to heaven. You can’t get to heaven by your good works. We sing:

“Jesus paid it all;

All to Him I owe.

Sin had left a crimson stain.

He washed it white as snow.”

Second, in 1 Corinthians 15:4, it says that Jesus “was buried.” Why does it say that? It says that because Paul wanted us to know that Jesus actually died. That means He actually rose from the dead. To have a resurrection, you have to have an actual death. It’s not a good idea to bury people who aren’t dead. So Jesus literally, actually died. Then He was buried.

And third, the historical fact is that “He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,” verse 4.

Thus verses 3-4 tell us that “He died for our sins, ”He was buried” and “He rose...the third day.” So Paul was eager to preach not a plan, not a philosophy but a Person.

It blows my mind that for over two decades, Paul had been traveling and preaching around the known world, during which he had been stoned, shipwrecked, thrown into prison, was in the midst of mob violence and riots and was whipped and beaten. When he had to defend himself as an apostle, he would take off his shirt and show the scars on his back that he took for preaching the Gospel.

And when you preach the Gospel, you won’t be liked by the world. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you....If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18,20). People are at war with God, and you are His ambassador, so since they can’t get to Christ, they attack you.

But we must be strong, courageous and bold. We must be debtors eager to preach the good news, which is that Jesus died for your sins, Jesus was buried and Jesus rose from the dead.

The third thing that Paul says is his belief, in verses 16-17. That is, “I am not ashamed.” He said, “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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith...” it starts with faith, continues with faith and ends in faith “... as it is written...” in Habakkuk 2:4 “...‘The just shall live by faith.’” So Paul’s belief was that he was not ashamed.

Why would anyone be ashamed of Jesus Christ? But many times we are. We don’t want to be thought foolish, we don’t want to be ostracized, we don’t want to be shot, we don’t want to be persecuted and we don’t want to be rejected. We want to be liked. So we are ashamed of the Gospel.

But this sentence, “I am not ashamed,” is a figure of speech. It’s a backhanded way of saying, “I glory in” or “I boast in the Gospel.” Not only is Paul not ashamed, but he actually boasts “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

When you become a Christian, you die to yourself, you die to your love of the world and “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). You die to your old life. You become a new creation in Christ.

Why would Paul possibly be ashamed? Because preaching the Cross is difficult. But he was not ashamed. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Can you image to the cultured, Greek mind, some peasant, Jewish Galilean was crucified on a Roman cross, and you're writing to the Romans saying that He is your Savior?! That just blew their minds. How could this possibly be?! Then Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." So you have to be convinced of the power of the Gospel.

Now I want to point out something in the text. In verse 14, Paul says he is "a debtor"; in verse 15, he says that he is "ready"; and technically, in verses 16-17, he gives us three reasons why he was ready to preach the Gospel. He starts by saying "for." That means he's giving us the rationale or the reason why he was ready to preach the Gospel. Number one, he was ready to preach the Gospel, because he was "not ashamed of the Gospel." Number two, because or "for" it was "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." The Gospel is God's power, and that's why Paul was ready to preach it. And number three, because or "for in it the righteousness of God is revealed."

Let me now break the text down hermeneutically into little sections. I want to give you six reasons why Paul was not ashamed. Number one, Paul believed in its source, which is God. Verse 16 says "the power of God." It's God's dynamic power. It's God's way of saving mankind. Who tells us how to get to heaven? God does. Whose idea was salvation? God's. Who provided the Savior? God did. The Bible says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Salvation was God's rescue plan. And it's the only one He has. So its source comes from God. Jesus said He is "the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Number two is the Gospel's nature. Paul says it has "power." The word "power" in the Greek is the word "dunamis." From it we get our words "dynamo," "dynamic" and "dynamite." So the Gospel is God's dynamic power. 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." So when you come to believe in Jesus Christ through the message of the Gospel, God's power transforms your life. The only thing that can change a human being is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it's the Spirit of God and the Son of God working in that heart to make that person a child of God.

To take Paul of Tarsus and turn him into Paul the Apostle—read his conversion in Acts 9. He was on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus to throw Christians in jail. He wanted them dead, but God changed him from a persecutor to a preacher of the Gospel. And today God can completely change your heart and your life.

Number three, Paul believed the Gospel's purpose. In verse 16 is the word "salvation." "It is the power of God to salvation." That's an important, key word. What does it mean? It means

“deliverance”; that we are saved from sin and death in three areas. First, salvation means we are saved from the penalty of our past sins. Jesus paid for them, so we are not going to have to spiritually die.

Second, Jesus saves us also from the power of sin. You can know deliverance from the power of sin in your life right now; you don't have to wait until you get to heaven. You'll never be perfect, but you'll be more like Jesus Christ. Your sins will be paid for and forgiven, and you will get a new nature, which is a new capacity, a new ability to live a life free from sin. He can set you free from sin's crippling power.

Third, Jesus saves us from the presence of sin altogether. When you get to heaven, you won't have to worry about sin. That's what makes heaven so wonderful. “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

So past penalty, present power and future presence; that's what it means to be saved. I like that.

You're either saved or you're lost. You're either going to heaven, or you're on your way to hell. There is no middle ground or middle road. Only Jesus Christ can save us from our sins, from Satan, from self and from the second death (Revelation 20:14).

And you can also know that you're saved and going to heaven. Some people think that's presumption and pride. “How could you possibly know?” The reason we know is because Jesus died, was buried, rose from the dead and He promised He would forgive us. We believe His promises. He said, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3). So we have His promise and the price He paid on the Cross to forgive our sins.

Number four, Paul believed in the scope of the Gospel. Verse 16 says, “for everyone.” “It is the power of God to salvation for everyone.” No one is excluded. The Bible teaches a “whosoever” Gospel. It is for the wise, the unwise, the barbarian, the Greek, the religious people, the Jew, verse 16, to everybody everywhere, verse 16. It saves Nicodemus, who was a religious Jew who needed to be born again. It saves the demoniac of Gadara. If Jesus Christ can transform a demoniac of Gadara, there's hope for you. If He can take this life ruined by sin and make a brand-new person, there is hope for you. He can change Zacchaeus. He can forgive the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). So the Gospel is universal in its scope.

Number five is its reception. Verse 16 says “who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” or to the Gentile. Put this alongside John 3:16, which says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes...” not “behaves” “...in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” I can't always behave right, but I can believe. This is faith. I like that.

That is why, in verse 17 of our text, Paul says, "The just shall live by faith." If you've been justified, it's happened by faith, by believing. And that's how you live—by trusting. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith..." that's "belief" "...and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Jesus saves us by just believing in Him.

Number six is its revelation, which is God's righteousness. "For in it..." the "Gospel" "...the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." That phrase "from faith to faith" means that salvation starts with faith, continues in faith and finishes in faith. It's faith all the way. Verse 17, "As it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" In Philippians 3:9, Paul the apostle said, he wanted to "be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

Someone said, "The Gospel is a righteous God making unrighteous men righteous, in a way that is righteous." Charles Erdman said, "The Gospel is the sweetest music ever heard upon earth, the most powerful message proclaimed among men, the most precious treasure entrusted to the people of God."

We need to believe the Gospel, we need to live the Gospel and we need to share the Gospel.

I need to give you an opportunity, if you have not yet believed in Jesus Christ, if you haven't yet trusted Him as your Savior, to do so. If you were to die today, and you don't know if you would go to heaven, and you've been running from God, I want to give you an opportunity to run to God. I want to give you an opportunity to pray to invite Jesus Christ to come into your heart, to forgive your sins, to make you His child, to give you the hope of heaven.

Maybe you've been coming to this church for weeks, for months and perhaps even for years, but you've never really been born again. You've never had your heart transformed by believing in Jesus Christ. You're trusting in your works and not in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The Bible says it like this: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). It says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15). Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

There are some of you who are far from God right now, and God is reaching out to you in this message. It's the good news. You don't have to die in sin and be separated from God in hell for all eternity. You can know your sins are forgiven. You can know you'll go to heaven. You can have assurance of salvation. And you can have a new heart, a transformed life, and be free, if you'll put your faith and your trust, today, in Jesus Christ.

I can't make that decision for you, but I can give you an opportunity.