



The Letter to the Romans

Good News for All People

4. UNASHAMED

Romans 1:16-17

INTRODUCTION

Verses 8-15 are the thanksgiving section of the letter introduction. Paul was truly thankful for the Christians in Rome, both Jews and Gentiles. He had long wanted to visit them and preach in Rome, but as the slave of Jesus Christ he didn't simply make his own plans and carry them out. He wanted to visit Rome to encourage them in the faith and also to be encouraged by them. He also wanted to preach the gospel in Rome.

Verses 16-17 function as a bridge between the introduction and the body of the letter. The gospel was the unifying theme in verses 1-15, and here he explains his readiness and eagerness to preach the gospel. The gospel is also the unifying theme of the entire letter. These verses are loaded with meaning. You could say these two verses capture the entire letter to the Romans. The themes of the gospel, salvation, justification, faith, God's righteousness, Jews, and Gentiles introduced here will all be explained throughout the letter. Paul will explain how the gospel reveals God's power and righteousness (1:16-17), how the gospel transforms lives (3:5-8; 6:1-23; 14:16), how the gospel compares with Judaism (9:4-5, 33-10:4; 11:25-32), how the gospel was given in past revelation (1:2, 17; 3:21; 7:12, 14; 9:6; 13:8-10; 15:8-12), and how the gospel unites Jews and Gentiles (10:5-6; 15:10).

In these two verses, Paul states what he is writing about and will spend his time exploring and explaining in this letter. By the end of the letter, he will also practically apply the gospel to their daily lives.

VERSE 16 THE POWER OF GOD

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

- Romans 1:16

This verse begins with Paul explaining his eagerness to preach the gospel in Rome, which he stated in verse 15. He begins with “for,” and it functions here like saying because. He is eager to preach the gospel because he is not ashamed of the gospel. The word for ashamed means to feel fear or embarrassment that prevents a person from doing something. Jesus used the word in Luke 9:26 to speak of someone being ashamed of him such that they denied him before other men.

Paul had suffered for preaching the gospel. He had suffered harassment, imprisonment, persecution, public mocking, stoning, and more for preaching the gospel. That suffering did not prevent him from preaching, because he believed the gospel he preached. He would be arrested in Jerusalem not long after writing this letter. He would be accused of capital crimes because of preaching the gospel. Ultimately, he would lose his life by execution for preaching the gospel. He was clearly not ashamed of the gospel.

One reason Paul was not ashamed of the gospel is because it is the good news of Jesus Christ, the good news of the Messiah. He had already explained the gospel originated with God and was promised before in the Old Testament Scriptures. The gospel promise concerns God’s Son, who was born in the flesh as a descendant of David. He died and was raised to life through the Holy Spirit to power. Paul wrote that Jesus gives grace to Jews and Gentiles alike. He called his apostles to witness of his resurrection and to give his words to those who believe. Paul himself was specially called to proclaim his name and his salvation among the Gentiles. The proper response to God’s good news of his Son is the “obedience of faith” (1:5). This means submitting to the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of David and God’s Son in power.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is not merely a message. It is not a philosophy to be debated, nor is it an abstract idea or passing fad. The gospel is power and effects transformation in people’s lives. Paul was the prime example of the power of the gospel. He had been as zealous for the law and traditions as any Jew. He hated the name of Jesus so much that he was persecuting Christians unto death with the authority of the chief priests. Yet, when Jesus appeared to him, Paul knew the gospel was true. Jesus had risen from the dead and is the Son of God in power. Everything changed for Paul.

Paul writes the gospel is God’s power for salvation. The word for salvation means deliverance, or rescue. The full scope of salvation is not merely a conversion experience, but the new birth to glorification in eternity with Jesus. Salvation is deliverance from sin, self, falsehood, darkness, etc., and ultimately from God’s wrath.

The gospel is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes. Salvation is by faith. Paul

will go on to explain that believing means faith apart from any and all works of the law.

Verse 16 ends by explaining the universal scope of the gospel as the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. Paul clarifies it is to the Jews and to the Greeks. He will later show how both groups stand equally guilty of sin before God and deserve condemnation. Paul will also show how both groups stand equally in need of salvation, and how both will equally be saved through faith alone in Christ alone. When Paul spoke of the “Jew first,” he pointed to the place of Jews, the nation of Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham through Jacob, in the redemptive purpose of God. Paul recognized there are promises to the Jews yet to be fulfilled, and he will go on to explain that later in the letter.

VERSE 17 THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

**For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written,
The just shall live by faith.**

- Romans 1:17

Next, Paul states that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. The word for revealed means to make fully known. Contextually, Paul is talking about the acts of God and here refers to the righteousness of God as revealed in the Old Testament to mean God’s faithfulness to his own word, glory, and name to bring judgment and salvation. Such was Isaiah’s usage in Isaiah 51:1-8. God’s righteousness in that passage is in reference to him keeping his word and to bringing both judgment and salvation. He faithfully brings judgment to those who do not hear his word and follow his righteousness, and salvation to those who hear and follow his righteousness. This righteousness of God in bringing the salvation promised in the Old Testament is uncovered in the sending of Jesus, his Son and Messiah, into the world. This is how he keeps his promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

The phrase “from faith to faith” has been translated as “from faith first to last.” The expression means completely of, or by faith. This agrees with what he has already written and the reference to Habakkuk in the next phrase. The righteousness of God to bring salvation is only uncovered to those who believe. It is uncovered not only in the knowledge of it, but in the event of it.

Paul then quotes from Habakkuk as the prophet agreeing with what he has said (Habakkuk 2:2-4). Habakkuk was a prophet to Judah during the ascendancy of the Babylonian empire to power. He wrote and prophesied just a few years before the Babylonians would begin attacking Judah and carrying the Jews away captive. The captivity of Judah had been prophesied, along with the captivity of Israel, more than one hundred years before it happened. Habakkuk prophesied to Judah that God was going to use the Babylonians to judge Judah. Habakkuk was not surprised by the judgment of Judah, but he was astonished that God would use the Babylonians, who were guilty of worse sins than Judah, to punish Judah. The book is a dialog between God and Habakkuk where the prophet asks how a righteous God could do such a thing (Habakkuk 1:12-17). So God’s righteousness seems to be in question

in the book.

In Habakkuk chapter 2, God answer's the prophet's question. God did promise judgment, but also promised salvation (Habakkuk 3:3-16; 2:14). God showed Habakkuk that salvation from his judgment would only come through faith. Habakkuk 2:4 means that life, escape from death in judgment, only comes through faith. So, Paul uses the prophet's words the same way to mean the just shall live, or escape death in judgment, only by faith.

CONCLUSION

Shame keeps people from embracing the gospel. It easily becomes an obstacle. Are you afraid of losing friends, family, position, or influence if you believe in Jesus Christ? What good will it do to gain the approval of the world for this short life and then the judgment of God for all eternity? Shame also keeps Christians from speaking the gospel to others.

We could go from Genesis to Romans 1 and show how God has made promise after promise and has kept his promises. He has also promised a future judgment. Paul will address this later in the letter. God has promised judgment on all who live and die in sin. He has also promised salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ. Do you believe? Do you realize that it is God's judgment you most need saved from?

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This series is a verse by verse expository study of the Letter to the Romans. Each sermon typically covers one paragraph of the text of the letter. This PDF is provided freely for personal study. Each sermon has been prepared and preached by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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