

Romans: The Good News of God

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Romans 1:16-17

Rev. Freddy Fritz

March 11, 2007

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Scripture

Today we come to Romans 1:16-17, which is the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans. Let's read Romans 1:16-17:

¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."
(Romans 1:16-17)

Introduction

At first glance it is an extraordinary thing that Paul should say that he is **not ashamed** of the gospel. For when we read that statement we ask, "Why would the apostle ever think that something so grand might be shameful?" That question is not very deep, since we have all been ashamed of the gospel at one time or another.

The reason we are ashamed of the gospel is that the world is opposed to the gospel and ridicules it, and we are all far more attuned to the world than we imagine. Today's culture endures a veneer of religious tolerance, so that people are careful not to scorn Christians openly. But the world is still the world, and hostility to God is always present.

If you have never been ashamed of the gospel, the probable reason, as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones suggests, is not that you are "an exceptionally good Christian," but rather that "your understanding of the Christian message has never been clear."¹

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 1, The Gospel of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1985), 260.

Was Paul tempted to shame, as we are? Probably. We know that Timothy was, since Paul wrote him to tell him not to be (in 2 Timothy 1:8). However, in our text Paul writes that he was **“not ashamed of the gospel,”** and the reason is that **“it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”**

Lesson

In our study of Romans 1:16-17 today, following the treatment of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, I want to suggest eight reasons why we should not be ashamed of the gospel.²

I. The Gospel Is “Good News”

First, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is “good news.” The word **“gospel”** means “good news,” and no rational person should be ashamed of the proclamation of good news.

We can understand why one might hesitate to convey bad news, of course. Imagine a policeman who must tell a father that his son has been arrested for burglary. We can understand how he might be distressed at having to communicate this sad message. Or again, imagine how a doctor might be dismayed at having to tell a patient that tests have come out badly and that she has incurable cancer.

When I was a young pastor I served as an overnight hospital chaplain once a month at the local community hospital. One night at about 3 o’clock in the morning I was called to a patient’s room. The family had been summoned because the patient had taken a turn for the worse and did not have long to live. When I entered the

² Lloyd-Jones devotes four chapters to developing these points (*Romans: An Exposition of Chapter I*, chs. 20-23, pp. 256-309).

room there were about ten or twelve family members already there. They had already received the bad news about their loved one's imminent death. I did what I could to comfort and console them in their grief.

But the **gospel** is not like this. It is the opposite. Instead of being bad news, it is good news. It is good news about what God has done for us in Jesus. It is the best news imaginable.

II. The Gospel Is about Salvation

Second, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is about salvation. And not just any salvation. It is about our salvation.

The background for this side of the good news is that, left to ourselves, we are in desperate trouble. We are in trouble now because we are all guilty of breaking God's law. We presently stand condemned by God's law. We are also in trouble with regard to our future; we are on a path of increasing frustration and despair, and at the end we must face God's just wrath and condemnation and the final execution of his sentence against us for our transgression of his law. We are like prisoners under the sentence of death.

Some years ago I visited a teenager in prison. He turned eighteen years old later that week. He was in prison for twenty years for armed robbery. I talked to him about the gospel and told him that every person in the world is already under the sentence of eternal death. It is not as if people are somehow "innocent" now. No! That is a most unbiblical truth perpetrated by the Liar himself, Satan. Every single person in the world is *already* under the condemnation of eternal death. That young teenager in prison had been convicted and sentenced to jail for a certain crime, and therefore he had a record. I told him that all people have a record in the court of heaven. God has a file against every single individual with every sin ever committed against his holy law.

But there is good news! I told my young friend in prison, and I say to you, that God has intervened to pay the penalty for sin and

transgression of his law through the work of his divine Son, Jesus.

Jesus paid the penalty for *all* of my sin, past, present and future. He took the entire record of my transgressions and paid the penalty in full so that the justice of God was completely satisfied. By asking Jesus to pay the penalty for my sin and believing that he did so, I have received a full pardon from God the Father. He has stamped across my record, “Paid in Full.” Therefore, there is now no condemnation for me because in Christ Jesus I have been set free from the law of sin and death (cf. Romans 8:1-2).

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because it is about salvation—a real deliverance from the guilt and penalty of sin.

III. The Gospel Is God’s Way of Salvation

Third, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is God’s way of salvation. It is not about man’s way of salvation.

How could Paul not be ashamed of something that has its roots in the abilities of sinful men and women or is something bound by mere human ideas? The world does not lack for such ideas. There are countless schemes for salvation, countless self-help programs. But these are all inadequate.

What is needed is a way of salvation that comes not from man, but from God! And that is what we have in the gospel! The gospel is God’s reaching out to save perishing men and women. The gospel is not sinners reaching out to seize God.

Paul speaks about this in two major ways, contrasting God’s way of salvation with our own attempts to keep the law, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, with our attempts to know God by mere human wisdom.

As to the law, he says in Romans 8:3-4, “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us,

who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.” This means that, although we could not please God by keeping the law’s demands, God enables us to please him, first, by condemning sin in us through the work of Jesus Christ and, then, by enabling us to live holy lives through the power of the Spirit.

As to wisdom, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:21, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”

IV. The Gospel Is Powerful

Fourth, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is powerful. This is what Paul emphasizes in our text: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone”** (1:16). That is, it is not only good news, not only a matter of salvation, not only a way of salvation from God; it is also powerful enough to accomplish God’s purpose, which is to save us from sin.

It is important to understand what is involved here, for it is easy to misconstrue Paul’s teaching. When Paul says that **“the gospel . . . is the power of God for the salvation of everyone,”** he is not saying that the gospel is *about* God’s power, as if it were merely pointing us to a power beyond our own. Nor is Paul saying that the gospel is the *source* of a power we can get and use to save ourselves.

Paul’s statement is not that the gospel is about God’s power or even a channel through which that power operates, but rather that the gospel is *itself* a power. That is, *the gospel is powerful*; it is the means by which God accomplishes salvation in those who are being saved.

Now, since Paul puts it this way, I agree with John Calvin when he emphasizes that the **gospel** mentioned here is not merely the work done by God in Jesus Christ or the revelation to us of that work, but the actual “preaching” of the gospel “by word of

mouth.”³ He means that it is in the actual preaching of the gospel that the power of God is demonstrated in the saving of men and women.

It was worth noting that Paul was most likely contrasting the power of Rome with the power of the gospel. Alexander Maclaren has a magnificent paragraph on the power of the gospel which Paul was bringing to Rome:

Paul wished to do in the center of power what he had done in Athens, the home of wisdom; and with superb confidence, not in himself, but in his message, to try conclusions with the strongest thing in the world. He knew its power well, and he was not [ashamed]. . . . If we would understand the magnificent audacity of these words of my text, we must try to listen to them with the ears of a Roman. Here was a poor little insignificant Jew, like hundreds of his countrymen down in the Ghetto, one who had his head full of some fantastical nonsense about a young visionary whom the procurator of Syria had very wisely put an end to a while ago in order to quiet down the turbulent province; and he was going into Rome with the notion that his word would shake the throne of the Caesars. What proud contempt would have curled their lips if they had been told that the travel-stained prisoner, trudging wearily up the Appian Way, had the mightiest thing in the world entrusted to his care! Romans did not believe much in ideas. Their notion of power was sharp swords and iron yokes on the necks of subject peoples. But the history of Christianity, whatever else it has been, has been the history of the supremacy and the revolutionary force of ideas.⁴

So also today. The world does not understand this divine working, but it is nevertheless true that the most powerful happening in the world at any given time is the preaching of the gospel. For there the Spirit of God is at work. There men and women are delivered from the captivity of sin and set free spiritually. Lives are

³ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross MacKenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 27.

⁴ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Man's Ruin: An Exposition of Bible Doctrines, Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), 163.

transformed—and it is all by God’s power.

V. The Gospel Is for Everyone

Fifth, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is for everyone. As Paul puts it, **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”** It is **“first for the Jew”** and then also **“for the Gentile.”**

Paul’s phrase **“first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”** has led some readers to think that he was saying something like “to the Jew above the Gentile” or “to the Jew simply because he is a Jew and therefore of greater importance than other people.” That, however, is not what Paul intends. In this text Paul means exactly the same thing Jesus meant when he told the woman of Samaria that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). Both were speaking *chronologically*. Both meant that in the systematic disclosure of the gospel the Jews had occupied a first and important place. This was because, as Paul says later in Romans 9:4-5, theirs was “the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ.” No one can fully understand the gospel if he or she neglects this historical preparation for it.

But this does not mean that Paul is setting the Jew above the Gentile in this text or, as some would desire by contrast, that he is setting the Gentile above the Jew. On the contrary, Paul’s point is that the gospel is for Jew and Gentile alike. It is for everybody.

Why? Because it is the power of God, and God is no respecter of persons. If the gospel were of human power only, it would be limited by human interests or abilities. It would be for some and not others. It would be for the strong but not for the weak, or for the weak but not for the strong. It would be for the intelligent but not the foolish, or for the foolish but not the wise. It would be for the noble or the well-bred or the sensitive or the poor or the

rich or whatever, to the exclusion of those who do not fit the categories. But that is not the way it is. The gospel is for everyone.

The Apostle John wrote, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). At Pentecost, the Apostle Peter declared, “*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21; cf. Joel 2:32). Indeed, the Bible ends on this note: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ *Whoever* is thirsty, let him come; and *whoever* wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).

How can one be ashamed of a gospel which offers hope to the vilest, most desperate of men, as well as to the most respectable person? How can we be ashamed of anything so gloriously universal?

VI. The Gospel Is Revealed to Sinners

Sixth, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is revealed to sinners.

When Paul says that the gospel of God “**is revealed,**” he is saying that it is only by revelation that we can know it. It is not something we could ever have figured out for ourselves. How could we have invented such a thing? When human beings invent religion they either invent something that makes them self-righteous, imagining that they can save themselves by their own good works or wisdom. Or they invent something that excuses their behavior so they can commit the evil they desire. In other words, they become either legalists or antinomians. The gospel produces neither. It does not produce legalists, because salvation is by the accomplishment of Christ, not the accomplishment of human beings. Nor does it produce antinomians, because salvation produces in Christians a love for Christ and his law.

Christians must always sing, “Nothing in my hand I bring, / Simply to thy cross I cling.” But at the same time, simply because

we have been saved by Jesus Christ and have his Spirit within us, Christians inevitably strive for and actually achieve a level of practical righteousness of which the world cannot even dream.

VII. The Gospel Is about a Righteousness from God

Seventh, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is about a righteousness from God. Paul says, **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed”** (1:17).

In ourselves we are not the least bit righteous. On the contrary, we are corrupted by sin and are in rebellion against God. We regularly break God’s law. To be saved from condemnation and wrath we need a righteousness that is of God’s own nature, a righteousness that comes from God and fully satisfies all of his demands.

And that is what the gospel reveals! Paul says in Romans 3:21-22, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

VIII. The Gospel Is by Faith from First to Last

And finally, we should not be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is by faith from first to last. Paul says in Romans 1:17: **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”**

What does Paul mean when he says **“by faith from first to last”**? In Greek the verse contains a repetition of the word **faith** in the phrase so that it literally reads, “from faith to faith” (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν). A more literal translation of the phrase suggests it means, “from the faith of one who has believed in Christ and received the righteousness of God to another who comes to believe as a result of the first Christian’s testimony.”

Every Christian ought to be ready to stand up courageously and unashamedly for the Lord. How inconsistent that a person redeemed by the blood of Christ experiencing saving power should cower before an unbelieving world!

On one occasion Frederick the Great invited some notable people to his royal table including his top-ranking generals. One of them by the name of Hans von Zieten declined the invitation because he wanted to partake of communion at his church.

Some time later at another banquet Frederick and his guests mocked the general for his religious scruples and made jokes about the Lord's Supper. In great peril of his life, the officer stood to his feet and said respectfully to the monarch, "My lord, there is a greater King than you, a King to whom I have sworn allegiance even unto death. I am a Christian man, and I cannot sit quietly as the Lord's name is dishonored and his character belittled."

The guests trembled in silence, knowing that von Zieten might be killed. But to their surprise, Frederick grasped the hand of this courageous man, asked his forgiveness, and requested that he remain. He promised that he would never again allow such a travesty to be made of sacred things. In ways like this, the gospel is passed from one to another.

Conclusion

Philip Henry, brother of the well-known Puritan Matthew Henry, calling one day upon a tanner, found him so absorbed in tanning a hide, that he did not notice his pastor's approach until he tapped him on the shoulder. In confusion the man said, "Sir, I am ashamed you found me thus."

"Nay," replied Philip Henry. "May the Lord Jesus, when He comes, find me discharging with the same faithfulness, the duties of my calling."

Brothers and sisters, like Philip Henry, and like the Apostle Paul, let us not be ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for everyone who believes. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, thank you for the gospel. Thank you that the gospel is the power of God for everyone who believes.

Help us never to be ashamed of the gospel.

Enable us to believe that the gospel is indeed “good news” about the salvation from sin and hell that you alone provide. May we be utterly convinced that the gospel is itself powerful for the salvation of sinners. How grateful we are that the gospel is for everyone and not just for a certain class or kind of people.

Thank you that the gospel is about a righteousness from God, and that it is received from the faith of one who has believed in Christ and received the righteousness of God and passed on to another who comes to believe as a result of the first Christian’s testimony.

Oh God! We will spend all eternity praising and thanking you for the gospel of your grace. Help us now then never to be ashamed of the gospel.

And all of this we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.