

GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! READ ALL ABOUT IT!
ROMANS 1:16-17

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

(v.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. (v.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.”

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So far, in the first 15 verses of Romans, we have come to see what it takes to be healthy individuals and healthy churches. We also come to the realization that a major part of healthy Christian living involves a wholehearted interaction with the Bible

Now we will begin to familiarize ourselves with some basic Bible terms. We throw around religious terms all the time and we think we know what they mean and we assume that everybody else knows what they mean as well. The problem is if we really pressed ourselves for concrete definitions, it would be difficult to come up with them.

For example, we talk about salvation, righteousness, revelation, and they all center round our definition of the Gospel. If we really understood the Gospel, it would affect us much more than it appears to. The people of the New Testament, who came in contact with the Gospel, were radically changed, people were healed, and people were willing to die for this Gospel while others were intent on destroying the Gospel. What is the Gospel and why is it so powerful? These are some of the questions we will try to answer.

If you were asked to give a clear definition of the Gospel, could you do it? I think if we really understood the Gospel, life would never be boring, and certainly Sunday mornings wouldn't be boring.

Now I know this story may appear to be similar to one in your church, but it's not. You see, I have a friend who pastors this church where the people loved their fellowship hour after the service they always served coffee, doughnuts, and bagels. The hour was sacred and no one dared mess with that ritual. One day, my friend got up the courage to find out what the deal was

with the fellowship hour. He went and sat down with the teenagers, because he knew they would tell him what the older people had in mind. One teenager said, “I think it’s to get the people awake before they drive home.”

Now I know that would never be the reasoning at your church, thank God. But the point still stands. The Gospel should never be boring.

I. THE PROPONENTS OF THE GOSPEL

I cannot be certain, but it seems as if people come to church for one of several reasons. Perhaps they come to see friends or they come to feel better or perhaps, they come because they think it's their religious duty.

I also think that most churches in the United States have become relatively impotent. There seems to be no effect on society, or the surroundings. Worse yet, churches do not seem to be affecting the faithful who come every week. In these first two verses, Paul seems to really be cranked up about the Gospel. I believe we are not living Christianity with power, because we do not understand what the Gospel is. **Truly understanding what Christianity is all about should radically change the way we think, act, and live.** In other words, if we come to understand the true nature of Christianity and the full power of the Gospel message, we should be radically transformed. I am hoping that we will be able to read this and have some understanding of the Gospel: What it’s for, what kind of power it has, and what its purpose is.

Let us talk a little about the proponents of the Gospel. **Understanding that the Good News is about God, rather than us, should give us a desire and the confidence to share the Gospel with others.** When we get stuck in life it is because we focus on ourselves, rather than God. For example, when we focus on our problems, our handicaps, and our limited abilities and

resources, then we become paralyzed. We do not tell people about the Gospel because we are intimidated, shy, or not very confident in our ability to do so.

Let me start out by defining the word Gospel. The Greek word is “euangelion.” The first part of the word is “eu,” and it means good. At the funeral service, someone delivers a eu-logy, a good word about the deceased. The second part of the word is “angelion” which means news or message. Angels were messengers of God who carried messages. So the word Gospel literally means Good News.

Now this is the important part, the Good News pertains to God, His power, and His salvation, His working out His plan on our behalf. Did you catch that? It has nothing to do with our power, our abilities, our resources, or about anything we lack or possess. The Gospel, the Good News is about God.

A. SHAME

Paul realizes that as he says, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel.” Why would Paul be tempted to be ashamed? Many commentators feel that Paul could never admit to being tempted to shame on account of the message after all, he was always so bold. They say that this particular figure of speech actually implies the opposite (litotes) they think Paul is actually saying, “I am proud of the Gospel.” That sounds nice, but that figure of speech is not used very often by Paul.

What could bring up this feeling of shame in Paul? First of all, Paul could be a little self conscious of his shortcomings as he traveled to Rome, the most powerful city in the world. It has the most powerful and influential politicians, religious leaders, philosophers, and poets as its residents.

Secondly, Paul may be a little concerned about his presence. Remember that this was the city of beautiful people and tradition has it that Paul was kind of ugly. He was short, bowlegged, bald, and hook-nosed, with bad eyesight, and had some sort of speech impediment. In addition to these faults, he was a Jew. Remember that we said that the Jews were kicked out of Rome by the Emperor Claudius in the year A.D. 49. He expelled the Jews because of their constant rioting at the instigation of Chresus this word was most likely a corruption of the Greek word “Christos” (Christ). This incident was recorded by the Roman historian Suetonius. After Claudius’ death in A.D. 44, the Jews and Jewish Christians started to come back to Rome and it would only be three years later, in 57 A.D., that Paul writes this letter to the Romans.

Keep in mind that the Greek and Roman world didn’t make a distinction between Judaism and Christianity. They felt that Christianity was a form of Judaism. So, because of the expulsion, they thought it to be a substandard, unruly religion. Add to this that when they celebrated communion, they claimed to be eating the body and blood of Christ, so the Romans accused them of cannibalism. You can see how this could cause Paul to experience some fear and shame.

Let’s add one more fact to the mix: Paul was coming to Rome, with a message of salvation and deliverance that has been won through a Jewish carpenter who was executed by the Roman government on a cross. The cross was the most humiliating end someone could face; in fact, it was against the law to crucify Roman citizens. Paul’s message was that this crucified, humiliated, Jewish carpenter was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. From a human perspective, that’s a pretty weak story in fact, it almost sounds like a fairy tale.

Paul is a realist. This message will not sell easily in Rome. Keep this in mind. Wherever the Gospel is preached, there will be opposition because the Gospel goes against

culture. The educated will think it foolish, the proud will not accept being humble, and the strong do not want to embrace weakness. The immoral will not want to live pure. Even though the Gospel is Good News, the common person does not want to hear it, let alone embrace it.

How does Paul come to terms with this to the point of acceptance? I want you to notice the progression through this passage. Paul starts with himself and he is able to muster up, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel,” and then he moves to the Gospel itself. The Gospel is the power of God. The Gospel is the righteousness of God. The Gospel is the salvation of God. Can you feel the change in Paul moving from “I am not ashamed,” to “I am confident and proud of the Gospel?”

Here is the key, if the Gospel is Good News about God, then we must keep the focus there. It is not about us or our abilities, or lack thereof, it is not about our power or lack of power, it is not about our goodness or lack of goodness, it is not about our righteousness, the Good News is about God.

I would like to leave this section with two thoughts. Paul will hit on these topics later in the book. What is hindering you in your Christian walk? What is it that’s holding you back? Paul challenges us this morning to take our attention off of everything, and put our attention on Jesus alone. He is the One who can overcome all of our obstacles in life. He, and He alone is what the Gospel is all about.

B. ACCEPTANCE

Ask yourself these questions; what are you ashamed of? What makes you hesitant to share the Good News about God’s love with others? My hunch is there may be a couple of reasons. First of all, we may not understand the Gospel ourselves. Well, by the time we get through studying the book of Romans, we all should have a crystal clear idea of the Gospel.

Secondly, our culture kind of shames us into the position that our religious beliefs are personal, and everybody's beliefs are just as valid as others. My prayer is that once we get through with the book of Romans we will be so saturated with the truth of the Gospel, that we, like Paul, will understand that it is such Good News, that we can't help but share it.

Keep this in mind as we come to understand what it means for us to be identified as people of the Gospel. **Understanding that the Good News is about God, rather than us, and should give us a desire and confidence to share the Gospel with others.**

II. THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

As we remember that we are children of the Gospel, and the Gospel is all about God, we are introduced to the power of the Gospel in the next phrase. **The Good News is that God desires to rescue us from eternal destruction and He has the power to actually save us.** In other words, this is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions, not only does God desire to save us, He also is powerful enough to accomplish it.

A. POWER OF GOD

Let us deal with this concept phrase by phrase. The Gospel is the power of God. Paul just got through saying he is not ashamed of the Gospel. Now he gives his reasoning even though Jesus looked weak even though the church looks weak and is almost always out of step with society, and even though the story itself looks weak, the Gospel itself is powerful. I really want to give you the flavor of this because all the great preachers throughout church history, all the great hymn writers, and all the great leaders understood this. We talked about the word power last week the word is "dynamis," from which we get our English words, dynamite and dynamic. The telling of the story of Jesus itself is how God unleashes His power into the world. He invades this world, which is under the control of Satan, not with soldiers, not with angels, and

not with military weapons, He invades the world with the story and the work of Jesus. God's Gospel invades human experience and it has the power to change lives. The Gospel itself has the power to plunder the kingdom of Satan. Jesus said that the very gates of hell could not keep out the power of God's Good News.

B. FOR SALVATION

That is a pretty bold statement. What is this Gospel message that makes it so powerful? Look at the next phrase. It is the power of God for salvation. I am purposely taking it slow through these two verses, because they kind of lay the groundwork for the whole book of Romans. We have to carefully define the terms, as they will come up over and over again so, it would be good for you to take notes. In addition to that, the Apostle Paul often has a particular thought in mind when he uses certain words the word used here for salvation is a good example. The Hebrews, the Greeks, Jesus, and the other New Testament writers used this word for salvation in a broad sense. Let me give you some modern day examples. If a basketball was headed out of bounds, and a player jumps in the air, over the line, and taps it back, we would say, "He saved the ball from going out of bounds." If my car breaks down, and you come and pick me up in time to make an important meeting, I would say, "You really saved my butt." If a doctor heals me, we could say, "He saved my life." With any type of rescue we tend to say, "The person was saved." Even the cartoon character Mighty Mouse used to say, "Here I come to save the day." The word for salvation is that broad it is used that way in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in common Greek writings.

However, Paul almost always focuses on one use of the word of salvation. Paul uses it in regard to our eternal destinies. In other words, because of our natural bent towards selfishness, self-centeredness, and our rebellion against God, in our natural state we are all headed for eternal

destruction, and doomed to spend eternity in hell. So even though we were all born physically alive, we were all born spiritually dead, and therefore, headed for eternal death. The opposite of being saved is to be perishing. The opposite of salvation is damnation. For Paul, salvation has to do with the eternal consequences of sin in our lives.

Now follow closely here, because this is very important; even though Paul's definition of salvation has to do with our eternal destinies, the status of our eternal destiny reaches backward into our present. I know that sounds confusing so I will repeat that, and then I will go on to explain it. Even though Paul's definition of salvation has to do with our eternal destinies, the status of our eternal destinies reaches backward into our present.

In our natural state, without God's intervention on our behalf, we are headed for eternal destruction we are headed for an eternity in hell. If that is our destiny in the future, then how does that affect our present? Well, we are in bondage to sin, to Satan, and to death. We are slaves of death, and so our life-styles fall in line with our eternal destinies and there is nothing we can do to change that.

However, this is what the Gospel, the Good News, is all about. Even though we could do nothing to change our eternal destinies, even though it appears that we are the tragic heroes caught in a Greek tragedy, unable to change the course of life planned out for us, God's power is enough to change everything. Since we find ourselves hopelessly and helplessly slaves to sin, Satan, and death, this leaves us afraid and trapped. However, because God loves us so much, He sent His Son, His One and Only Son, Jesus to earth, for the purpose of saving us, rescuing us, and to change our eternal destinies. How powerful is the Gospel of God to rescue us and save us? It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. It is resurrection power that saves us.

Now here is the important part. Once we are saved, meaning that our eternal destinies have been changed from eternal destruction to eternal life, those consequences also reach back into our present. No longer are we in bondage to fear, to sin, to Satan, or even to death we have been set free and given life, right here and right now. We are no longer dead men walking we are people alive in Christ.

So for Paul, salvation means changing our eternal destinies from death to life, from eternal torment in hell to eternal life in heaven with God. That is Good News with power. I don't think we Christians think about that enough. For Jesus, it was this motivation that gave Him the desire and the courage to go through with His mission of salvation, to die on the cross for your sins and for mine. For the apostles, including Paul, this Good News allowed them to suffer and die martyrs' deaths. They didn't care about anything else in this world. As the hymn says, "It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me." The message is if our eternal destinies are settled, if we have been saved from death to life, then anything else we receive in this life is a bonus. That's what Paul is saying. That's what salvation means for our study through the book of Romans.

C. TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES

Well, how do we get this salvation? The next phrase says it is available to everyone who believes. We are saved by the power of God by believing the Gospel. In other words, we are changed from death to life by believing the Good News. Do you see how powerful Paul says the Gospel is? Now, here is where we will have to clarify what Paul means by belief. Paul has already talked about faith he will use faith and belief as synonyms. First of all, belief is not a work it is not to be looked at as some good deed that will yield us a gold star. Secondly, belief is more than just mental assent or the intellectual acceptance of a fact. For Paul, faith, belief, is a

response to the offer of salvation from God. It is the action of saying, “yes” to God’s offer, based on the belief that God is offering salvation through Jesus.

Picture it like this. Let’s say that I bought you a present. I wrap it nicely, and include a touching card. In order for you to possess this gift, you have to believe a few things. First of all, you have to believe that I don’t want to harm you. For example, you don’t have to call the F.B.I. because you suspect I have loaded the gift with anthrax. Secondly, you have to believe the card I wrote; it says that I am giving you this gift because of my love for you. Third, you have to believe that based on our relationship, I know you will enjoy this gift. The only response for you is to receive it, open it, and enjoy it.

Somehow, we have come to be very judgmental of unbelievers, as if we are better because we are Christians. This should never be. Keep this in mind we are saved, not because we are good or morally superior we are saved, simply because we received a gift from God.

- TO THE JEW FIRST

The next phrase fascinates me and occupies a lot of my thinking. Look, who is the Gospel for? It is for the Jew first. Did you catch that? The Gospel, the Good News, the message of Christianity, belongs to the Jew first. We have just finished studying through the book of Genesis, there we saw that through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promise of this Good News was to be carried through, and fulfilled throughout the nation of Israel. Jesus was born of the family of David, from the tribe of Judah. He is the Jewish Messiah.

Now think about this carefully. The most pressing question of the early church was whether or not a non-Jew, a gentile, first had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian.

How badly have we as modern day Christians fallen? Because of all the horrible things we have done over the centuries in the Name of Jesus, and because of an anti-Semitic attitude of many Christians, Jews have come to believe the Gospel is for Gentiles, and not for them. The Gospel comes from the Jews and is primarily for the Jews. Paul will go into greater depth on this topic later on in Romans. This Gospel is the power of God to save His people and to redeem His people, the people of faith. This is Jehovah, the God of the Jews, and Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.

- TO THE GENTILE

Yet, this message has become distorted into making Jews feel as if Christianity is alien to them and hostile towards them. I'm not sure how a Jew could be able to give a neutral hearing to the Gospel as Jewish, and Jesus being Messiah.

But Paul is reminding us here that this offer of the Gospel actually fulfills Israel's destiny. God promised Abraham that he would be blessed, and through him, all nations of the earth would be blessed as well. The surprise here, for those of us who have read and studied through the Old Testament, is not that the Gospel is for the Jew, but that this is the promised time that Gentiles would be included in God's covenant promise of salvation, redemption, and deliverance.

The Good News is that Jesus died so that we could have eternal life. That is a powerful message and I pray that all of us spend hours, days, weeks, and years meditating on. I think if we truly comprehend that by grace, as a free gift, God transformed us from eternal death to eternal life, any obstacle we face in life would be but a bump in the road. You see, **the Good News is not only that God desires to rescue us from eternal destruction He has the power to actually save us.**

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

And if we continue on, we can see what the purpose of the Gospel is. **The Good News is that God is faithful. Even though we could never be righteous on our own, God gives us His righteousness.** You know, sometimes when we don't have enough money, we have to borrow money from one another sometimes when our faith is weak we have to borrow faith from one another and sometimes when we run out of sugar, we have to borrow sugar from one another. Well, the fact is, we will never have enough righteousness to stand before God, so we have to borrow His.

A. REVELATION

First, the Gospel is revelation. The word in Greek means to uncover, disclose, reveal, and to bring into light that which had been hidden. The Gospel is revealing God's powerful plan of salvation. Paul has just revealed that Gentiles have been included in God's plan for salvation. Paul has shed light on the point that God offers salvation, as a free gift and now, Paul will inform us that God's righteousness is discovered in the Gospel.

B. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

As we now talk about God's righteousness, I need to give you a little word study so we don't get confused as we study through the book of Romans.

First of all, the word, right, righteousness, just, justice, justification, and other words, all come from the same root word in Greek that's why it gets a little confusing for us in English. So when we see justification, righteousness, just, and right, let's keep in mind that they are similar in meaning and because of this, commentators have argued about what the righteousness of God means here.

The first view is that the righteousness of God refers to a divine attribute of God. In other words, God is righteous. He will always do the right thing in fact He can be counted on to

always do the right thing. So righteousness describes one of God's characteristics and He will reward good and punish evil. The second view says that the righteousness of God is a divine activity. In other words, it describes the act of God coming to our rescue. It describes His divine intervention by sending Jesus to take care of the sin problem for us. The third view says that the righteousness of God is forensic it describes His judicial ruling. God pronounces us not guilty.

I think that all of these are actually included in Paul's view. The righteous nature of God leads God to act righteously on our behalf. Once He has acted righteously on our behalf, He freely declares us to be righteous.

This is what is being disclosed. God is righteous and since He is righteous, He can't tolerate anything that is unrighteous. Let's put this in plain language; God is perfect. He is trustworthy to always do the right thing and make right decisions He can be counted on to judge between right and wrong and since God is so clean and perfect, we could never stand in His presence because we are so sinful, imperfect, and dirty.

But because he loves us so much, he designed an answer to our problem. He sent Jesus, His perfectly righteous Son, to clean us up. Since the penalty for sin is death, Jesus died on the cross for our sins and it is His blood that cleans us and makes us acceptable to God. By God's righteous decree, He declares us to be not guilty. He applies His own righteousness to us, He takes Jesus' work and gives it to us.

Our Righteousness

And that brings us to our righteousness. The way this happens is simply through faith. Paul says that this righteousness is applied to us through faith from first to last. There is a lot of ink spilled over this phrase, "faith from first to last," but I think it has a simple meaning. The whole story of salvation, the whole idea of God giving us His righteousness, is received only by

faith. Faith is the beginning of the story, the end of the story, and everything in between. Faith is the way we are to live life. Paul goes on to quote the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk. Now Habakkuk can be quoted two ways. First, “Those who have been made righteous by faith shall live.” In other words, those who place their faith in Jesus shall be changed from death to life. The second interpretation is, “The righteous will live their lives by faith.” Again, I’m going to say I think both of those are right and justified here.

Paul has made it clear that the way we become righteous, the way we are saved, is through faith, by believing and receiving the Good News of the Gospel, and trusting in the righteousness of God to keep His promises.

But if you think about where this quotation comes from, it tends to remind us that, as those who have become part of God’s family, we must continue to live on in faith. In good times, in bad times, and in confusing times, we must trust in the righteousness of God. No matter how we are feeling, no matter what’s going on around us, no matter what our circumstances, we must have faith that God will always do the right thing. God is going to use a pagan nation to discipline His nation of faith. Habakkuk will have to trust that God knows what He is doing, and that what God is doing is good and right. During your personal Bible reading time, go back and read the prophet Habakkuk, and see in what context this quotation appears.

Our response to God is always to be one of faith. We receive salvation by faith. Who shall live by faith, those who have received God’s righteousness? By what shall the righteous live? Live by faith. What shall those whom God has made righteous do? Live by faith.

Look, the Good News is that God is faithful. Even though we could never be righteous on our own, God gives us His righteousness.

If you didn't get all the concepts, and all the definitions, you can request a tape of this message. These are the topics Paul is going to expound on throughout the whole book of Romans. I hope we come away from the book of Romans with a powerful understand of the Gospel.

Because, **truly understanding the Good News of what Christianity is about should radically change the way we think, act, and live.**

After preparing and preaching this week's message, I'm convinced that the reason we are so weak at evangelizing our family, friends, neighbors and people we come in contact with every day, is because we do not fully understand the message of the Gospel. Listen to one man's confusion.

Ashamed of Jesus – A Hindu of high rank was disturbed in mind on the subject of a future state. He had heard of Christians and desired to converse with them about their religion and to gain information about the Lord Jesus Christ. He visited Great Britain provided with introductions of leading people. At a great banquet he said to the gentleman sitting next to him, "Can you tell me something about Christ?" "We do not speak about such subjects at dinner parties," was the reply. Later he was invited to a fashionable ball and took the opportunity of asking his partner for information about Jesus Christ. Again he was told that a ball was no place for such a subject. "How strange these Christians in England are!" said the Hindu, "They seem ashamed to speak about their religion and of Christ, its Founder."

Can you and I say with Paul?

Romans 1:16-17 NIV

¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷For 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."