

Romans 1:16-17 - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and join me in Romans chapter 1. Our text for today at long last is Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17.

! Verse 16 and 17 state the thesis or the theme of the entirety of the letter, and we must be careful to get these verses rightly understood.

I'm grateful that over the coming, let me suggest, years, we will be unpacking the content of these two verses. The pastor, Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his preaching of these verses, which he preached four sermons on, said, I suppose that, in a sense, there are no two verses of greater importance in the whole of Scripture than the two verses which we are now considering.

You see, if we misunderstand these verses, then we will find ourselves misunderstanding the gospel itself. If we don't get these verses right, our evangelism will go awry, and we will lose our ability to be effective witnesses to our great salvation.

We will either get the message itself wrong, or we will get the methodology of preaching that message wrong, and likely both. However, if we, by the power of the Spirit, can rightly understand these two verses and Paul's expounding of them over the next 16 chapters, then perhaps we can be used of God to see his kingdom advance, and there is no greater joy for the Christian than to be joined in God's purpose in the world.

[2 : 04] So, with the weight these two verses deserve, and with the favor of our God, let's read them and work to wrap our minds around their meaning this morning.

Before I read just these two verses, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good, and so we would do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises, to obey its commands.

Paul writes, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for our salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. These two verses contain the theme of Paul's letter to the Roman believers, which I've stated before.

Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. If we are ever to be declared before God as a righteous judge, justified, forgiven, found righteous, this will happen by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

[3 : 25] Before we consider these verses at length, I would like to point out the logical progression of Paul's writing. Note the word for at the very beginning of verse 16.

Paul's writing is full of for's and therefore's. One assertion building on the next. We have in our text today a four at the beginning, another halfway through verse 16, another at the beginning of verse 17, and then we will see one at the beginning of verse 18, verse 19, and verse 20.

A therefore at the beginning of verse 24, and two fours in verse 26. All of these are just the fours and therefore's that begin in verse 16 and go through the end of the chapter.

And I point this out to you simply to show you the logical progression of Paul's case. And this is the way that he most regularly wrote and ministered the gospel.

Acts chapter 17, beginning in verse 2, we see the record that Paul went in as was his custom. And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

[4 : 56] And then Luke records for us in verse 4 of Acts 17, and some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. This was his regular habit.

He reasoned with people. The great reformer Martin Luther would say to those who disagreed with him, show me from the scripture and plain reason.

Help me to think and to understand. Now, from time to time, Paul seems to become enraptured with some glorious truth of God and erupt into praise in the form of a doxology.

I'm thankful for those texts. But most often, he progresses neatly from one assertion to the next, which means we must be careful to pay attention to the entirety of his argument if we want to understand it.

And it's a danger with all the Bible to take it out and selectively look at passages, little texts here and there. People have erred greatly across history in doing so.

[6 : 04] I think especially with Paul and especially with Romans, we need to see the progressive argument that he is making. This is going to become increasingly important as our study through this letter continues.

How do we rightly understand Romans chapter 9 and 10 and 11 in light of chapter 1, verse 16 and 17?

We need to work to get this correct today. In the case of this very first four in verse 16, in light of all that I said, let's note what precedes it in verses 14 and 15.

Paul says there, I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I'm eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

He speaks in verse 5 of chapter 1 of being sent to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations. And he sees this as an obligation, as stated in verse 14.

[7 : 11] But it's not an obligation he takes up begrudgingly, but with eagerness, he tells us in verse 15. So why? Why is Paul so eager under this obligation to preach the gospel to all peoples?

He tells us, verse 16, for, because I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Paul says, I have been sent to the nations, so as a servant of Christ Jesus, see verse 1. I am obligated to Jews and Gentiles, verse 14. And I am eager to preach to everyone because the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

Paul is eager to see the power of the gospel on display amongst those in Rome. But note, he inserts a curious phrase before declaring that the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

He could have simply said that, but he says, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation. I am not ashamed of the gospel.

[8 : 31] Paul here uses a literary technique that he uses elsewhere. I'll spare you the details of that technique. But what he does is he makes his point in stating the negative of that point.

He says, I am not ashamed of the gospel, by which we understand that he is instead proud of the gospel. But why not simply say that? Why not just say, I do this, I am eager to do it, because I am proud of this gospel message in which I preach.

The opposite is true. He is proud of it. But why state it in the negative form instead? He says, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

Now, it is, of course, difficult to know the mind of Paul, but I wholeheartedly believe he does so because we tend toward being ashamed, not toward being proud of the gospel.

Perhaps he had heard that the Roman believers needed to be encouraged in this way. But I think more likely he knew that his tendency and ours, the Roman believers' tendency, is toward shame, towards feeling ashamed of the gospel rather than towards being proud of the gospel.

[9 : 52] And I can think of at least two reasons that this may be the case, why we might tend towards feeling ashamed of the gospel. Number one, the gospel doesn't speak to the world using the world's economy.

It begins metaphysically, a baby born to a virgin. It is saturated with humility, a baby born to insignificant people in an insignificant place, laid in a manger, worshipped by shepherds, a savior trained as a carpenter with nowhere to lay his head, traveling around with an insignificant, bumbling band of men, saying things like this, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came and flipped the logic of the world upside down.

[11 : 31] And they were looking for him to be a Christ that would come and ride victorious and defeat Rome on behalf of Israel. But instead, our Savior was a Savior who was crucified on a cross.

The world is inclined to listen to messages that are about self-worth and about pride. Messages that tell people that they are valuable and worthy and generally just okay.

But beloved, the gospel does not begin with this message. The gospel begins with humility. It begins with brokenness over sin.

It begins with offense. The good news at first is bad news apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

We are utterly wretched of no spiritual worth, rebels against our maker. The gospel begins with humility.

[12 : 42] It becomes good news to people who are broken, humbled because of their sin. the Puritan Thomas Watson once said, until sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.

If a quote-unquote gospel is being preached that agrees with the carnal man, then we must become very suspect of that gospel because it is likely not the gospel at all.

The gospel first offends the unbelieving person because it strikes at their pride. But if it has its good effect, then it brings him low that God might exalt him in Jesus.

The gospel first breaks that it might build up. So the world is not inclined to like this message and it's inclined to push back against this message which can in our hearts make us ashamed of this message.

The second reason that I can think of that we might become ashamed of the message is that the gospel isn't a philosophical system designed to be mused over.

[14 : 03] It's not just ideas to be thought about. It demands obedience, decision, allegiance. It requires something of us.

The world loves to speak and think about things that have no real bearing on life. Those of you who have taken a philosophy course have been exposed to this.

You maybe take the easy A, but you think, what are we doing? Paul certainly had been exposed to this. This is not a new thing in our day.

In Acts chapter 17, again, we see recorded, now, while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that city was full of idols.

So he, here he again is, reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him and some said, what does this babblers wish to say?

[15 : 11] Others said, he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Oropagus saying, may we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting for you bring some strange thing to our ears.

We wish to know therefore what these things mean. Now all the Athenians, Luke tells us, and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Later on in the chapter, Luke records, now when they heard the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. Some mocked Paul.

His message was just getting a little too weird for them. And he expected something of them. in verse 30, he stated, the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Gospel message is not merely a thing to be thought about and mulled over, but something to respond to. It demands something of us.

[16 : 26] The gospel doesn't pull any punches. It calls people to repent and believe. Turn from your sin, dear sinner, and throw yourself on the mercies of God in Christ.

The world thinks itself wise, and it wants to take up ideas that have no real consequence. The gospel has consequence.

Paul writes to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 3, 18, let no one deceive himself, if anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. I had a conversation with family members a couple of days ago who were wrestling with how to best love their lesbian neighbors with the truth.

A couple who had lived together and were quote unquote married for some years brothers. And their well-meaning concern was the gospel's offense at their identity as a couple.

[17 : 35] And they asked the question, how should we approach them? The concern, I think, well-meaning concern was that they would be offensive to them and that maybe they wouldn't be able to talk to them again.

And I just replied, simply say, we love you. And because we love you, flee from the wrath to come. This life is but a vapor, and it will be over in a moment, and then you'll stand before God in judgment.

Flee from the wrath to come. To withhold this from them is altogether unloving. Each and every one of us have heard and need to hear, flee from the wrath to come.

Flee to Christ. Find the salvation of your soul, your justification before God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Beloved, for the good of all mankind, we must join with Paul in declaring we are not ashamed of the gospel.

The gospel is powerful to save, but it will offend. It will offend. And we must be aware that the temptation in our hearts is to be ashamed of it, to shrink back when we should press forward, to boldly proclaim this truth.

[19 : 02] This world is in desperate need of the gospel. Paul continues to build his argument. He's not ashamed of the gospel for, because, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

God's word in the gospel. The great trouble of the Christianity of our day and our culture is pragmatism. It is a cancer in the bones of the church.

And that is, I think, well-meaning people, wanting to see people respond in faith to the gospel will justify any means to get people to that ends.

They've abandoned God's ways. They've abandoned his word in order to convince people to follow Christ. And the concern becomes, are people truly following the Lord Jesus?

Have they repented and believed if we haven't preached to them the gospel? If we've said to them, you're generally okay, and what you need is a little extra, a little additive to your life.

[20 : 15] If we haven't said to them, you are altogether unrighteous, and what you need is what the reformers called an alien righteousness, a righteousness that comes from someone else, the righteousness of Christ, then aren't we just damning them to labor harder, to do more, that they might gain their way to God?

The gospel message is the means that God uses to bring about the salvation of his people. You were desperately lost apart from Christ.

Christ lived the life that's required of you. He died the death that you deserve, that in him you might be forgiven of your sins and you might have his righteousness.

The great exchange, double imputation,! This wonderful doctrine that we can be restored to God in Jesus. God will bear up under the weight of a world that is hostile toward the gospel if we don't believe that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

If we think somehow our methodology will convince people to follow Christ in a world that is vastly and rapidly becoming post-Christian. Paul had certainly had his allegiance tested.

[21 : 41] He did not live in an easy time to proclaim this gospel. He tells the Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 24 and following five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one three times I was beaten with rods once I was stoned three times I was shipwrecked a night and a day I was adrift at sea on frequent journeys in danger from rivers danger from robbers danger from my own people danger from Gentiles danger in the city danger in the wilderness danger at sea danger from false brothers in often without food in cold and exposure and none of us can identify with Paul in this way and yet Paul says I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and he just kept right on preaching it why why would we be ashamed

Paul knew that the gospel was powerful to save and that it must! preached he says later in the book of Romans chapter 10 and verse 14 how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed

and how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching Paul didn't separate himself from the means of God using the gospel powerfully to save people now evangelicals have been historically good at guiltting congregants into being shares of the gospel and this is not my goal here let me remind you that Paul expresses his obligation in verse 14 but also his eagerness in verse 15 his task was a joyful task because he was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of

God for salvation to everyone who believes so we have a message that we ought not be ashamed of right a message that it ought to be a great joy for us to share with others to call to others to repent and believe to flee from the wrath to come to turn from your sin and turn to Christ I have found the salvation of my soul the gospel is the power of God to save me and I want joy of a Christian ought to see others turn in faith to Christ to see the power of God alive and active in their lives as well this good news is the driving motivation of the Christian life it is the theme of this great letter and the theme of Paul's life it was the theme of King David's life he declares in Psalm 40 verse 9 and 10 I have told the news of deliverance in the great congregation behold I have not restrained my lips as you know oh Lord I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation the gospel ought to also be the theme of our lives for our good for the good of others to the glory of God we ought not be ashamed of the gospel oh my look at what time it's gotten to be we going to stop at this point perhaps the Lord wants us to consider this over this next month and we'll pick back up the rest of our study of this text when we come back together off of Advent season to

Romans let conclude with a quotation from Charles Spurgeon he once wrote if sinners be damned at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies and if they perish let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees imploring them to stay if hell must be filled let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for let's pray together as