

Romans 1:16-17 - Part 3

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 1.!

I want to begin by reiterating what I stated the previous two times we looked at this text.

We must be careful to get these verses rightly understood. Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his preaching of these verses, 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 have heard me say, 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. So, we have some careful work to do this morning and I pray we will rightly understand all that's held for us in the final phrases of these two verses.

[1 : 44] Before I read them, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and for our good. And so, we do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

Paul writes, Romans chapter 1, verse 16 and 17. For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God for 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. And we have carefully considered the phrase, for I am not ashamed of the gospel.

We've given you reasons why Paul wasn't and why we ought not be ashamed of the gospel. Right there in the text is very reasoning, the phrase we considered last Lord's Day.

For it is the power of God for salvation. And we thought about what it meant to be saved. Saved from and saved to.

[2 : 56] And how it is that the gospel is powerful. This morning we will take the rest of verse 16 and all of 17 phrase by phrase.

We've broken that down into four pieces together. The first of which is to everyone who believes.

So, Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Paul does not state that the gospel will save everyone. To understand the text that way would be the error of universalism. He qualifies who will be saved.

Everyone who believes. Or you could say to everyone who has faith. We spoke last week much of the power of God that is this gospel.

It is a power that sets out to accomplish a purpose. And necessarily accomplishes the purpose that it intends. We will explore this much further in our study of Romans.

[4 : 06] But please get here on the front end. The necessity of belief does not detract from the power of God for salvation.

Let me repeat that to you. The necessity of belief does not detract from the power of God for salvation. Faith or belief is the avenue by which God saves.

But it is not the power for salvation. Beloved, if you fail to understand this glorious truth. Then you will always be confused about the gospel.

You will either think that you added something to the equation of your salvation and find yourself proud. Or you will think that you now need to add something to your salvation and will find yourself defeated.

Let's hear some more of Paul's theology in Ephesians chapter 2 beginning in verse 8 and following where he writes, By grace you have been saved through faith.

[5 : 16] So there's the avenue, right? The power of God. Grace. Saved through faith. The avenue. And then he clarifies, verse 8, And this is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God. This faith through which we're saved is a gift granted to us by God. Verse 9, Not a result of works so that no one may boast.

So that no one might find themselves proud. Verse 10, For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And so we also have no need to feel defeated because we are made by God in Christ to work. We don't work that we might be made like Christ, but we are in Christ and so we work.

In order to be saved, we must believe. But this necessary belief is granted to us by a merciful God. Then, having believed, he works graciously in us to cause us to walk in his ways.

[6 : 32] I hope that these grand truths will take to new heights in your mind this morning and then will settle deep in your heart that you may know the comfort and joy of being saved by the power of God, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If these truths aren't doing this edifying work for you, then I hope that you will hang in with us as we continue to study this inspired text in the coming months. Paul is going to unpack this at length for our benefit.

Now, we would cut this phrase short if I wasn't careful to say that you cannot believe in just anything that you would like. You can't make a Christ or a gospel of your own choosing and find yourself saved.

Paul here is being specific. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. It's not a gospel, not some good news, not a version of good news, but the good news, the gospel. And so out of concern that anybody would be unclear, what is the gospel? What must we believe to be true in order that we might be saved?

[7 : 53] We must believe that God created a world and you in it, that he intends for you to be an image bearer, but that that image bearing was destroyed by our federal head, by Adam.

He represented us. So not only are we born into sin, but we willingly sin. We, in our very nature, reject the lordship of our God.

Our God is holy and he can have nothing to do with sin. He cannot become friends with sin. And so the proper, just response of God for sin is that sin would be punished, that his enemies would be vanquished one day, fully and forever.

But because God is also merciful, he sent his son to live the life that he demanded of us, the righteousness found in the law, to die the death that we deserve, bearing God's wrath for our sin on the cross, to rise again three days later, defeating death fully and finally, and that one day Christ will return and make all things new.

And this gospel, this good news, requires a response on our behalf, a turning from our sin and our believing that we can be saved.

[9 : 26] This is the gospel that he is referring to. We also don't do well to only think of this idea of believe as a mental assent to stated truths.

You this morning might go, sure, sure, all those things. Yep, you may have grown up in church and heard them again and again. But it is the sort of belief that changes you.

This Greek word is packed full of meaning for us. It's not merely some mental assent, but it is a belief that changes the trajectory of your very life.

Now, those of you paying attention, notice that I have a copy of Pilgrim's Progress with me this morning. So, here we go. If you're a guest this morning, I joke that if you stick with us long enough, I'll read the entirety of this book to you as I read excerpts from it.

This book was written by a Puritan by the name of John Bunyan, and he does such a good job of putting into literary form, allegorically, the journey of the Christian.

[10 : 33] In fact, the main character in the book is named Christian. And at this point, in this little bit that I want to read to you, he's picked up a companion along the way named Faithful. Faithful and Christian are walking along, and they encounter another character by the name of Talkative.

And he knows the things to say. In fact, much of the discourse that he has with Faithful seems very positive, this Talkative.

He says some amazingly true things about God and about the nature of man and about the nature of salvation. But then Christian beckons him over and says to him, this man doesn't believe anything that he says because we know him back in our town to be a wicked man.

These things he says he believes have worked no real change in him. And so Faithful desires to be parted with him. He doesn't want to have just meaningless conversation anymore.

And so he asks Christian, what shall we do to get rid of him? Take my advice and do as I tell you, and you will find that he will soon be sick of your company also, unless God touches his heart and changes it, Christian suggested.

[11 : 50] Faithful asked, what would you have me do? Christian answered, go to him and enter into some serious discourse about the power of religion, which he will affirm, I assure you.

Then ask him plainly whether this power is something that is truly working itself out in his heart and in his home and in his behavior. So Faithful stepped back over to where Talkative was walking and began to converse with him.

How are you doing? He asked. Very well, thank you, Talkative replied. I thought we should have a great deal of talk by now. Faithful offered, if you would like, we will continue our conversation.

And when we last spoke, you left it to me to pose a topic for discussion. Here is my question. How does the saving grace of God make itself known when it is in the heart of man?

I see, Talkative stated. You want to talk about the power of things. Well, that is a very good question. I will be happy to answer you. I will make my answer brief and to the point. First, where the grace of God is at work in the heart, it causes there to be a great outcry against sin.

[12 : 57] Secondly, Faithful interjected, wait a minute. Let's consider your points one at a time. I think you should have said, it makes itself known by inclining the soul to abhor its sin.

Why, what is the difference between crying out against and abhorring sin? Talkative inquired. I hope the Christian in the room knows the answer to that already. Faithful answered, there is a great deal of difference.

A man may cry out against sin out of principle, but he cannot abhor it unless he has God's own antipathy against it. For instance, I have seen many cry out against sin in the pulpit who yet abide it well enough in their own heart, home, and manner of life.

Potiphar's wife cried out against Joseph with a loud voice as if she had been very holy. Yet she would have gladly, despite her cries to the contrary, committed adultery with him.

Some cry out against sin as a mother cries out against her child when she calls her a good-for-nothing and a naughty girl and then smothers her with hugs and kisses. I think you're trying to trip me up with details, Talkative accused.

[14 : 07] Faithful responded, no, I am only trying to set things right. But what is the second way in which a work of grace makes itself known in the heart of man? Great knowledge of gospel mysteries, Talkative offered.

Hear this, my theology-loving brothers and sisters. Don't stop loving theology, but be sure you're loving the God of that theology. Faithful countered, this sign should have been first, but first or last, it is also false.

For knowledge, even great knowledge, may be obtained in the mysteries of the gospel without a work of grace in the soul. The truth is that a man can have an abundance of knowledge and still be nothing, and so consequently, no child of God.

When Christ asked, Do you know all these things? And the disciples answered, Yes. He added, Blessed are you if you do them. That's John 13, 17.

He did not pronounce a blessing for knowing, but for doing. For there is a knowledge that is not connected with doing. He that knows his master's will and does not do it.

[15 : 16] A man may know like an angel, and yet not be a Christian. Therefore, the point you make is not true. Indeed, to know is something that pleases talkers and boasters, but to do is that which pleases God.

Not that the heart can be good without knowledge, for without knowledge the heart is empty. But there are two kinds of knowledge. The first alone in its bare speculation of things, and the second is accompanied by the grace of faith and love, which causes a man to do the will of God from the heart.

The first kind of knowledge will serve the talker, but a true Christian will not be content until his knowledge results in sincere works that please God. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law.

Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. But Psalm 119 and verse 34. Talkative protested, You are trying to trap me again. This is not edifying.

Well then, tell me another way in which the saving grace of God makes itself known when it is in the heart of man, faithful challenged. And Talkative responds, Not I, for I see we shall not agree.

[16:25] So, I hope, one, and less importantly, that you want to read the poem's progress. It'll be good for your soul. Secondly, much more importantly, that you see that it's altogether possible to say that you believe something to be true, to hold it in your mind and have it not affect change in your heart.

Those who love God will find themselves in increasing measure loving him in his ways more and hating the world in that way more. There should be an evidencing of this belief.

So, the gospel that Paul is not ashamed of is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Have you believed the gospel of Jesus Christ?

If you have not, throw yourself on God's mercy this morning. The next phrase we see is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Here we see a most wonderful declaration. The gospel is offered to everyone. Not just to the person of Jewish descent, but also for all other nationalities.

[17:49] Lloyd-Jones again, he says this, why is this a gospel for everyone? The answer is because it is God's power. If it were not God's power, it would not be for anyone.

This statement to the Jew first and also to the Greek is a statement of chronology and not preference. Paul is not saying that the Jewish people have greater importance or more image-bearing worth.

historically, salvation came first to the Jews. Now you can think about this as it concerns Jesus' ministry.

He was careful in who he came and preached the gospel to. An evidence of this is in Matthew chapter 10 verse 5 and 6 where he sends out the apostles instructing them, go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He was concerned chronologically but not in importance. In keeping with this point, when Jesus appears to the disciples at Acts 1, what does he tell them there?

[18:59] You will receive power. This is the verse 8. when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in, think chronology, Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

this gospel is the power of God for salvation for these Roman believers whether Jewish or not and most scholars agree that this was a mixed audience.

Paul is going to develop this truth further for us throughout his letter with particular intention to its implications in chapter 11 so I'll let you hold your breath on all that this means until chapter 11 but this morning simply and profoundly hear this this gospel is the power of God for salvation for you regardless of how you might perceive yourself however far you might be from his grace however far you think you may be from salvation God is powerful to reach you and bring you to himself to the Jew first and also to the Greek this includes an offer to all people to repent and believe he goes on in his logical progression he keeps adding these fours beginning of verse 17 for in it the righteousness of God is revealed Paul tells us that something is revealed which means to make plain or make clear or make known we do not have

Christianity without revelation we will not stumble across saving truth without a loving God making it known to us we believe that the scripture is the revelation of God to us Paul says that the powerful gospel makes something known it makes known the righteousness of God let's begin understanding this phrase by defining the word righteousness let's just start there righteousness is the quality of being morally perfect and don't miss this morally perfect without fault having both obeyed everything and not disobeyed everything morally perfect Paul says the gospel reveals the righteousness of God now certainly our God is righteous he is without fault he is morally perfect we often use the word holy to describe this attribute think of revelation 4 8 this picture that John has of heaven of four living creatures with six wings and full of eyes around and within day and night they never cease to say you think of what they say holy holy holy which is a compounding thing in Greek saying perfectly holy without any fault he is holy upon holy upon holy is the Lord God almighty who was and is and is to come but is it God's holiness that Paul is here referring to a certain Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther thought so to his great detriment look out I've got a second book this morning I keep saying I need a larger pulpit I need a preaching desk this is really key right we are Protestants for good reasons right we believe in sola scriptura we believe what it teaches us to be true we had better get this right this is the text that launched the Protestant

Reformation I'm going to step over a little bit of history I'm reading Lloyd-Jones quoting Luther and I hope that it'll be clear when he's speaking and when Luther is speaking if not you're welcome to borrow my book listen carefully it is just at this point we're talking about right now that the experience of

[23 : 19] Luther is such great value to us because Luther while he was yet a Roman Catholic decided to give a series of lectures on the epistle to the Romans he came up against this verse and because of his misinterpretation of the meaning of the righteousness of God he passed through an agony of soul listen to his own words I labor diligently and anxiously as to know how to understand Paul's word in Romans 1:17 where he says the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel I sought long and knocked anxiously for the expression the righteousness of God blocked the way you see he thought it was just a description of God's character and of God's being and as he stood before this revelation of God who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all a God who was so just that he cannot even look upon sin as he saw this righteousness of

God he just felt it was impossible he says that this expression the righteousness of God blocked the way to salvation for him and he went further and said as often as I read that declaration I wished always that God had not made the gospel known you see he thought that it meant that in the Old Ten Commandments and the moral law yes but he thought it was an imperfect revelation of it and that it's only in Christ you get a full revelation and one which is infinitely greater he thought the gospel of Jesus Christ was condemning to him as it revealed God's righteousness he misunderstood the text and he found it to be a block for him to believe the gospel he wished the gospel had been never preached praise be to

God that he unveiled the full meaning of this text to Luther before we get to the last part of verse 17 look with me at another verse where Paul employs this phrase the righteousness of God this is Romans chapter 3 and verse 21 if you'd like to turn there briefly here we see right at the beginning of verse 21 but now the righteousness of God there it is again the righteousness of God has been manifested or revealed apart from the law although the law and the prophets bear witness God to God to God to us to us to!

to us by Christ has been revealed Luther came to understand the doctrine of double imputation which he called the great exchange our sin given to Christ and his righteousness given imputed to us Paul speaks of this in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21 where he says for our sake God made Christ to be sin gave our sin to Jesus who knew no sin he was perfect without fault he was holy so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God right his law keeping given to us we've got to get this right if we're going to understand this verse again from

Lloyd Jones speaking of Luther he called that abstract conception of the righteousness of God and he could not get past it God's holiness but then he suddenly saw this phrase the just shall live by faith oh he said there is such a thing after all then as a just person a righteous person there is the abstract righteousness here is the concrete righteousness he then said what is this and suddenly he saw it he saw that this is the whole difference between the law and faith he had been trying to work a righteousness according to the law but there is an absolute stumbling block to that this righteousness of God but now he begins to see how are these people righteous Ah!

[28 : 06] it is a righteousness by faith so then that righteousness of God does not mean the attribute of God it is a righteousness that God gives so hear that it's the righteousness that comes from him it's a righteousness he gives and he gives it to faith Luther's whole life was revolutionized he saw the abstract and the concrete coming together and this is how he puts it when I saw the difference that law is one thing and gospel another I broke through he broke through the barrier that was holding him back and he goes on as I had formerly hated the expression the righteousness of God I now began to regard it as my dearest and most comforting word so that this expression of Paul's became to me in very truth a gate to paradise what a revelation what a transformation from a miserable wretched unhappy monk counting his beads and fasting and sweating and praying and yet being more and more conscious of failure to the herald of the reformation to the glorious preacher of the gospel rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of

God and it came to him through understanding Romans 1:17 the abstract righteousness the concrete righteousness a righteousness that's granted to us by Christ in the power of the gospel to see this and see it clearly to get the gospel right the final phrase the rest of verse 17 from faith for faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith now I love and appreciate that Paul is an Old Testament preacher let's not unhitch our faith from it Paul has now referenced faith four times in

verses 16 and 17 he refers to everyone who believes or has faith in verse 16 and then we see in this last bit of phrase again from faith for faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith which is a citation from

Habakkuk 2:4 recall that I have told you that the theme of this letter is that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone a lot of ink has been spilled working out the exact meaning of the phrase from faith for faith and I'm going to spare you the details by simply telling you the prominent view which I wholeheartedly agree with if you'd love to read about it I encourage you to do so with your muck boots on another fair way to translate this phrase would be by faith to faith so the righteousness of God is granted by faith to faith and this phrase parallels believes in verse 16 and adds to it continuing faith John MacArthur says of this text there is emphasis here on the continuity of faith it is not a one time act but a way of life the true believer made righteous will live in faith all of his or her life this is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints we believe and we believe and we believe we hang on to the precious promises that are ours in

Christ and we do so until the end and the promise that accompanies such faith is life we are granted life by faith in the gospel and we continue life by faith in the gospel there is a lifetime of meditation found in these two verses we have spread it thin over three weeks to hope to hope you will in eager expectation join me as we continue to impact them in our study of Romans I will conclude with a final reading chapter one verse 16 and 17 when Paul says let's pray together as