

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 November 2017

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, today I'd like us to turn back and to continue our study on the book of Romans, and today we reach the great words of verses 16 and 17 where Paul says, 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.

Now we've been studying Romans and we've been saying that there's various themes that run through the whole book and the main theme running through this letter is the theme of the gospel. Paul in Romans is telling us all about the good news of Jesus Christ. In the very first sentence of the book, Paul says, I'm an apostle set apart for the gospel of God and then as we read he launches in to this rich and glorious teaching about the nature of the gospel. Then in verse 8 to 15 he talks about his deep love and affection for these Christians at Rome and in doing so he reminds us about many of the priorities that should lie at the heart of the church. And he has all these hopes for the church in Rome and they culminate in verse 15 where he says, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. And there's that word again, gospel, the good news of Jesus, the theme of this letter. And that brings us to these great words that we have in verse 16 and 17. These are words that sum up Paul's life. He was not ashamed to stand up for the gospel and he strove all his life from when he was converted to teach people that great message of salvation, that through faith we can be made right with God. These words sum up Paul's life. These words also sum up the whole of the rest of the letter to the Romans.

Because in many ways, the chapters following on from these two verses are simply unpacking what Paul says in verse 16 and 17. So what is Paul saying in these two great verses?

Well first of all, he says, I am not ashamed of the gospel. And that's an amazing statement. Here Paul is just nailing his colors to the mast. He is openly associating himself with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when he is saying that he is not ashamed, he is acknowledging that he is not in any way embarrassed by his association with the good news of Jesus. He is not trying to hide it. He is not trying to conceal his allegiance to the gospel. He is glad to publicly align himself with the good news of Jesus. He is not ashamed of the gospel. And when he says words like that, and when we read words like that, I hope that we are all saying, neither am I. But when we say a phrase like that, I am not ashamed of the gospel. We have to acknowledge that for us today, there is a lot of pressure to be ashamed of this gospel. We face pressure from the world around us. People think today that believing in God is like believing in fairy tales. People think that believing the Bible is old fashioned and almost ridiculous. And people think that living a Christian life is narrow minded and almost a bit backward, almost a bit weird. As far as the world is concerned, we should be embarrassed to associate ourselves with the gospel. We face pressure from the world, from the whole world, from society. We also face pressure from our own community, whether that's among neighbours or classmates or colleagues, maybe even among family. We face pressure to conform to what other people are doing. So when you are at school or at work, you might be ridiculed because you are not willing to get drunk with everybody else. Or because you believe that it's wrong to have sex outside marriage. Or because you would rather be at church than going out in the town. Or because you won't eat your dinner before saying grace and giving thanks to God. There's pressure to conform.

[4 : 58] There's also the pressure of being spoken about. So and so started going to church. So and so is going to the prayer meeting. So and so has gone forward. There's this huge pressure because people might talk about us. And in our workplace or in our community, there's this, there's a lot of forces telling us to conceal and hide our association with the gospel. So we face this outward pressure. We also face inward pressure. Because all the time we are battling with our own

sinful nature. The Paul calls it the flesh, this sinful nature that we are all born with. And at the heart of that sinful nature, there lies a sense of shame. Remember when Adam and Eve sinned, the first thing that they did was to try and cover themselves because they became aware that they were naked and they hid from God. They were ashamed of what they've done. And when we look at our lives, when we look at our hearts, there are so many things that make us feel ashamed, things that we've said, things that we've thought, things that we've done, you look back at things you've done. I think for all of us, if we go back to our teenage years, there's so many things you think, oh, man, why did I do that? But even in our daily lives, even I'm probably in the last, probably in the last week, there's things that we look at and we feel a sense of shame. And all too often our instinct is to hide these things and to try and give the impression that they're not there. And that's why very often you'll find maybe at work if somebody makes a mistake, they can be defensive, almost aggressive, because they're trying to push away a sense of shame and a sense of insecurity. And one of the things about the gospel is that it exposes the true nature of our hearts. That's why Jesus said those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinner. But for the human race, it's often very, very hard to admit that we're wrong. And that's why sometimes we want to keep the gospel at arm's length, because we don't want to expose the sense of shame that we often feel. So the world is placing big pressure on you to be ashamed of the gospel. But do you know that the world and the devil always turn the truth on its head? Because the world is saying to us, you should be embarrassed to believe in God. You should distance yourself from such a primitive book as the Bible. You should be ashamed of the gospel. But do you know what the real truth is? The real truth is that you only need to look at the news headlines from the past week to see wickedness, violence, immorality, greed, and a host of further evidence that shows it is the world, not the gospel, that is the embarrassment. The world thinks that we should be ashamed of the gospel. The real truth is that we should all be utterly ashamed of the world. And when we look at the fact and observe the fact that the media in modern 2017 Britain, that media, television, television programs, films, they are saturated with sex

and violence. When we see that there are massive gaps between rich and poor, even here in Scotland. When we see people's lives who are utterly ravaged by addiction. And when we see society delighting in the mistakes of others and gladly exposing and reveling in the errors and mistakes that people made when we see a world like that, we need to ask ourselves, are we proud to be part of that society? Or are we deeply ashamed? Paul makes it very clear that he is not ashamed of the gospel. It's an amazing statement and a wonderful statement. But not only does Paul say, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, he goes on to give reasons for that.

There's that little word there, for. It's a great wee word because whenever you see it, it's introducing reasons. It's explaining what has just been said. Paul has said, I want to preach in Rome because I'm not ashamed in the gospel. And then he gives us reasons why he is not ashamed. And I want us just to spend a wee while focusing on the two statements that he makes. He makes a statement in verse 16 and he makes a statement in verse 17. And these are two things that we must understand. And these are two things that we must make sure that we never, ever forget. So what's Paul saying? Well, first thing he says there, he says, it is the power of God for salvation. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Now, this is highlighting a point that every single one of us needs to write on our hearts. It is highlighting the fact that at the center of the gospel lies the power of God. Now, as Paul says here, the gospel is all about salvation. There's that key word right in the middle that you can see it. In other words, the gospel is a rescue mission. And that rescue is necessary because we are in desperate danger. That's the sin, the situation that sin has left us in. Bible teaches us that we are sinners. Our first parents sinned and from them, sin and death has spread to all humanity so that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The Bible teaches that that is true and experience proves it. Because you only have to look at the world to see the overwhelming evidence that sin is a reality in every single human being. The doctrine of sin, I've said this before, the doctrine of sin is incredibly easy to prove. The evidence is everywhere. And so whilst humanity is made in the image of God and therefore we possess many wonderful gifts and attributes, at the same time we are all sinners and we all need rescuing. C.S. Lewis famously said, man is a glorious ruin. So we need to be rescued. But the vital point is that we need to recognise that we are absolutely powerless in terms of getting ourselves out of this situation. Our original relationship with God has been broken as we were reading to the children Adam and Eve were expelled and chaos ensued in the world

after that. We are helpless. God is righteous, God is holy, God is perfect and we are not. And we're helpless in that situation. Paul speaks to the Ephesians that he talks about that. He says, remember that you are at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Without God we have no hope. We don't have the resources, we don't have the ability, we don't have the strength, we are powerless. But the absolutely amazing news of the Gospel of God is that salvation is accomplished, applied and available through the power of God. It is all through God's power. Now I want you to look at this slide. This is what we call redemptive history. Redemptive history is basically the way in which God's plan of salvation has been worked out across the ages of history. The book that we're reading to the children is a book about redemptive history. And as you look at redemptive history there are key events that take place and here are some of them on the screen for you to see. And for every one of these events the Bible tells us that God's power lies at the heart of it. At creation, Jeremiah 10, 12 tells us that it is he who made the earth by his power. At the Exodus, 2 Kings 17 tells us that God brought the people out of the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm. At the incarnation, the first coming of Jesus, the angel said to Mary, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. God's power at every moment. Same at the crucifixion, Hebrews 2 talks about how through death Jesus destroyed the one who has the power of death. The power of the cross destroyed the power of Satan. The resurrection is the same for he was crucified in weakness, writes Paul in 2 Corinthians, but lives by the power of God. Philippians 3 says the same thing, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And then the final event in redemptive history which is still to come, the second coming, it says they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. At every stage of redemptive history, God is demonstrating his power. And do you know the absolutely amazing thing? God is using all of that power so that you can be saved. God's power lies behind every stage of his saving work. It's all about the power of God. But there's a really important point that arises here that I want to just mention for a minute. You look at that list of redemptive history. You see all the stages. What stage are we at? Where are we in the stages of redemptive history? Creation is in the past, so is the exodus, so is the incarnation, so is the crucifixion, so is the resurrection.

[16:38] That's all in the past. And the second coming is still in the future whenever that may be. But what stage are we at now? Well, the stage that we are at is called the last days. And this is the period of history between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and his return on the last day at the end of history. And these last days are the days in which the Gospel spreads to all nations. And the vital point I want us to recognise is that exactly the same principle which applies to all the other stages applies to us now. The spread of the Gospel and the expansion of the Church is all accomplished how? By the power of God. And the New Testament makes this abundantly clear because see some versions.

Acts 1-8, Jesus says to the disciples, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 2. He says, when I came to you, I didn't come proclaiming the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. The spread of the Gospel, the growth of the Church and the gathering in of God's people is all accomplished by the unstoppable power of God. And that should give us as a congregation so much encouragement and it should give us so much confidence because everything that we try to do here as a Church we are not doing on our own and every work of outreach that we engage in, every single effort that we make to witness, our mission as a Church is empowered by God. That's why

Paul can say, the God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are the jars of clay, just fragile earthen vessels that on their own are pretty useless and fragile, but the power doesn't

rest in us, the power rests in God. So can we reach out to the community around us? Can you invite somebody to Church this week? Can you explain the Gospel to somebody? Can you help lead somebody to faith in Jesus Christ? Too right you can because you have the power of God behind you and within you.

The Gospel is all about the power of God. But then Paul tells us who the Gospel is for, and we can go back to verse 16, it's for everyone who believes. And that phrase captures a vital balance that lies at the heart of the Gospel. At one level the message of the Gospel is for absolutely everyone. It is a free, universal offer of salvation, open to all. God's power and God's desire is that no one, absolutely no one, will perish and that every single person would come to salvation in Jesus Christ. The offer is to absolutely everyone, but at the same time there is a particular response that is required. You must believe. And it's reminding us that although the Gospel is universally offered, the Gospel is not universally received because some people refuse to believe. Some people push God away and you and I have got to make absolutely sure that we are not among them. That salvation has come to the Jew first and then expanded to the Gentile. That's what redemptive history tells us. We read in the book to the children about how God chose Abraham and through his descendants God would establish a people. That was the Jewish people. But the reason that God chose Abraham was not just so that Abraham would be blessed, but that so that all nations would be blessed. God's great plan was that through Israel, hope and salvation and restoration would come to absolutely everyone. The great goal was that through Abraham and his people, all the nations of the world would be blessed. So it's important to remember that that phrase, the Jew first and also to the Greek, it's not a divisive statement. It's the very opposite. It's a unifying statement that in Jesus Christ, God is establishing a united people for himself that stretches across all the nations of the world. So you and I have to make absolutely sure that we understand what is being said here. The power of God for salvation is available for everyone who believes. And if you want to become a Christian, you've got to lay hold of these words because these words strip away any notion that you can't be a Christian.

Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever feel I want to be a Christian? But I can't. Well, what these words are telling you and me is that what you are doesn't matter because it's all about the power of God. It's not about your power. It's about God's power. And who you are is not a hurdle either because the gospel is for everyone and everyone includes you. The only question is, do you believe? Are you trusting in Jesus? So Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

[23 : 49] But then he tells us something else about the gospel in verse 17. He says, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. Now, what does this mean? Well, here Paul introduces a word that is going to come up again and again and again. In many ways, it's the key word for the next seven chapters in Romans, the word righteousness. In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. Now, first question is, what is righteousness? What does righteousness mean?

Well, basically righteousness is referring to God's standards. I think I've said this many times before, but it's always cute to think of it this way. Righteousness is God's standards, his standards of behavior, his standards of conduct, his standards of character, God's moral standard that shapes everything that he is and everything that he does. God's righteousness, it is his standard. And the key point is that God's standards are at the highest level. God's truth is at the highest level. God's faithfulness is at the highest level. God's promises are at the highest level. God's consistency is at the highest level.

The thing about God is at the highest level and God never, ever, ever compromises his standards. We often compromise our standards, don't we? How many of us have thought, you know, I would never, ever do that, only to find that we do it. And yet, God never compromises his standards, even though they're at the highest level. And we should be so thankful for that because we must not think of God's righteousness as a kind of brutal strictness.

It's easy to think about that, oh, God's righteousness, that means that he's kind of this really hard taskmaster. That's not what it's saying. God's righteousness is telling us that God is a pillar of glorious purity, truth, fairness, justice, wisdom and goodness.

In other words, God's righteousness means that it is absolutely impossible for God to be bad. God is righteous. His standards are at the very highest level and he never, ever lets us down in maintaining these standards. And in the Gospel, that righteousness is revealed.

[26 : 39] Now, we'll be talking more about righteousness in the coming chapters and we'll go into it in more detail. Just now, I just want you to note two important points. First of all, in the Gospel, God's righteousness is shown to us. God is showing us his righteousness.

Across the ages of redemptive history, God was revealing himself more and more. But the ultimate revelation of God is in the Person of Jesus Christ. And if you look at Jesus, you see what God is really like. So if you want to know what the righteousness of God is like, you look at Jesus. And people might say about God, oh God seems harsh, God seems cold, God seems distant. You look at Jesus and he went and touched a leper. He went and spoke to a woman whose personal life was an absolute mess. He went and comforted those who mourned. He was so good to people. That's what God's righteousness is like. And so we see God's perfect righteousness in his ways. God's righteousness is revealed so we can see it. We can see what God is like. And the nature of God's righteousness, as we'll see later on, is at the heart of defining the Gospel message. So God shows us his righteousness.

You can know a bit about what God is like and never forget what an amazing privilege that is. But not only does God show us his righteousness, he also shares his righteousness with us. And Paul will go on to explain how this works, that God's righteousness is given to us as a gift. And on the cross, our unrighteousness is placed on Jesus. His righteousness is placed on us. And a glorious exchange of righteousness and unrighteousness takes place. And the result is that everyone who believes is righteousified. But we don't say righteousified. We say justified. But it means exactly the same thing. And all of that is a result of what Jesus has done. It's all logical. Always remember, the Christian message is just thoroughly logical.

And people like me who are engineers like things to be logical. That's one of the many reasons why I love the Gospel. It is so logical. Jesus has come. He's acted on our behalf. He has done something for us. He is taking our sin on himself. He is offering us the gift of righteousness. He is doing absolutely everything because He is the one who has the power and all He asks us to do is trust Him. That's why the Bible asks for faith. Because we're just trusting what He has done. It's perfectly, beautifully logical. If somebody does something for you, you simply trust them and rely on the fact that they've acted on your behalf.

That's exactly what lies at the heart of the Gospel message. So in a world that has been wrecked by sin, instead of abandoning us as we deserve, God says, I will show you my righteousness.

[30 : 18] I will show you what a perfect model standard really looks like. But not only will I show you my righteousness, I will bestow it upon you as a gift. And that means that not only can we see God's righteousness, we can actually become righteous ourselves. And from first to last, we depend entirely on Jesus, which is why Paul says it's from faith for faith or from faith to faith. You could translate that literally says from faith into faith.

But what he's basically meaning is that from start to finish, we depend on Jesus. And we never ever graduate from trusting in Him and relying on Him completely.

Now there's a lot more to be said about this because in many ways Paul's taking us to really, it's like the real nuts and bolts and heart of how Christianity works. And there's lots of things we could say. And I hope we'll see these in the coming chapter. As we finish in just two minutes, I want to make a really important point and what I think is a really interesting and significant point. Remember that Paul has said, I am not ashamed of the Gospel, even though he just like you faces pressure, face pressure to be ashamed of the Gospel. But we need to ask ourselves a question. What events in your life are you most ashamed of? What's the thing that you just, it makes you kind of cower and you think, oh man, I can't believe I did that. And as you think of that, ask yourself another question. Was that behavior an act of righteousness or an act of unrighteousness? In other words, where the silly things that you and I have done, where they sinned? And I'm 100% sure that they are. Because the things in life of which we are most ashamed are all ultimately a result of our sin. And that shows us that it is unrighteousness that brings a sense of shame and sorrow and regret in our lives.

Unrighteousness leaves us feeling ashamed. So that means if you want to be ashamed, then go and follow the world. Go and drink too much. Go and gossip. Go and sleep with whoever. Go and exploit colleagues that work for your own gain. Go and indulge in all sorts of immoral entertainment. Go and take everything the world is offering you and you will end up with a sense of utter shame. Unrighteousness brings shame. It brings hurt. It brings the bitterest sorrow. And this is where we see how unbelievably relevant the Gospel is for the present day. Because you look at the world around you, it is so interesting. We live in a world where people abuse power and they indulge in

unrighteousness.

We see that all the time. People everywhere, they abuse their positions of power. We see people everywhere who indulge in things that are unrighteousness. We see it all the time.

But yet at the very same time, the world craves righteousness and the world loads the abuse of power. For example, the whole film industry over the last 30, 40 or more years has glamourised sex massively. So that hardly anybody is horrified by the explicit content of films nowadays.

[34 : 35] And so we indulge in that unrighteousness. As we indulge in that righteousness, we feed the power of the film industry, don't we? And so as people pay to go and see films and things like that, the film industry becomes more and more and more and more powerful because people are indulging in righteousness, building up power. And yet when that power is abused, as we've seen it been done so in recent days, everybody cries out, that's wrong. Because we crave righteousness deep down. Because we know that that abuse of power is absolutely wrong. And here is where we see that the world is so broken and so twisted because the world indulges in unrighteousness and that gives people power. But then the people who have the power indulge in that power and they give people unrighteousness and they subject them to all sorts of sickening and immoral behaviour. So people indulge in righteousness, it gives people power. People take that power, they abuse it and they make people victims of their unrighteousness. They use the power for unrighteousness and yet all the time we still indulge in unrighteousness to give them the power and the world is going round and round and round in this cycle of madness. But in the Gospel we see the God who is gloriously different.

We see the God of limitless power but he uses that power to save people like you, helpless sinners. And we have the God of perfect righteousness who will never ever ever be bad and never ever ever be bad to you and will one day restore creation into a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness will dwell. That is what Christianity is all about and it is no wonder that Paul says, I am not ashamed of the Gospel. What about you? Let's pray. God our Father we thank you so much for the Gospel. We look at the world around us, we see people indulging in unrighteousness, we see people abusing power, we see ourselves in amongst all of that, we too are drawn towards things that are wrong, we too use the power that we have for our own gain and yet at the same time we look at all these things and we know that it's wrong and we long for something different and we thank you so much for the Gospel that is different. And we thank you that in the Gospel we see your righteousness revealed and indeed we see your righteousness given to sinners like us. And so we thank you for that Gospel, we thank you that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and oh God we pray that there would be no one in here who is not part of that everyone who believes. Oh Lord be at work in our midst because you are the one with the power and so we look to you in Jesus name. Amen.