

Not Ashamed Of The Gospel

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Preacher: Phil Pickett

[0 : 00] What if you then want more back to Romans chapter 1 verses 16 and 17? Well, I'd love to preach through the whole of the book of Romans sometime. That's not what we're doing tonight.

And we're simply looking at these two key verses. Let me read them once more for us. 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 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. Well, this evening we're looking at this well-known verse of Romans chapter 1 verse 16, and I guess dipping into verse 17 as well to understand it.

And one theologian said that you can't understand the book of Romans without understanding this verse. It's a pretty bold claim and that's because this verse is packed full of truth that is not only central to the book of Romans, but I think we could also say central to understanding the Christian life of faith.

Now, the apostle Paul who wrote this letter had never actually been to Rome, but if you glance at verse 15 in your Bibles, you see that he was eager to come and preach the gospel to the church in Rome.

[1 : 18] And you might wonder, well, if there's already a church in Rome, why was Paul so keen to go there? It wasn't Paul wanting to go to places where the gospel hadn't been preached. Well, at the end of Romans in chapter 15, Paul speaks about his desire to travel to Spain.

Now, Rome in those days was the center of the ancient world, all roads led to Rome. And so Paul was hoping that Rome would be the staging post.

It would be the sending church to send him on his way to support him on his proposed missionary journey to Spain, the launch pad, as it were.

But for that to happen, the church in Rome needed to become as persuaded about the gospel as Paul was. They needed to be totally on board with his mission to bring the gospel to Spain.

And so Paul writes this letter. It's a letter to get the church clear about the gospel, to convince about the gospel, and to get them excited to share it. Now, Paul, of course, takes a whole letter to go through this to do this.

[2 : 23] But verses 16 and 17 are a pretty good summary of his argument, as right at the beginning, he really tells us what drives him, what motivates him to preach the gospel, and what drives him to write the letter and go on to Spain.

Not only that, they're incredibly then relevant to us today. You might be surprised that Paul begins with the words, I'm not ashamed. You know, why doesn't he say, I'm confident in the gospel?

He used it to say, I'm not ashamed. Clearly that was a risk for him. He knew it was a risk for the Romans. And he knew that it's something that is easy today. What's the biggest, one of the biggest things that stops us believing, supporting and sharing the gospel?

I suspect sometimes it's shame. I suspect shame is right up there. A few days ago, I got out a blank sheet of paper. I wrote down all the reasons why I'm tempted to be, why I'm tempted to be ashamed of the gospel.

I don't know if any of these ring true for you. I'm not always hopeful that people will believe the gospel. I'm not always convinced that people will change when they hear the gospel, whether Christians or not.

[3 : 33] I'm sometimes anxious that when I share the gospel, I'll sound deluded. I'll sound foolish. I'll sound unscientific. I'm worried that maybe when I speak to the gospel, people will think I'm intolerant.

Well, there'll be other consequences as new laws are put in. I wonder if you've ever felt those things. I wonder what you'd add, whether the gospel is even true, whether you're worried that you won't be able to keep up following Jesus.

How do you answer these fears? How do you battle these fears? One of the main things I found helpful over the years is going back again and again to Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. Because it's people like me, it's people like you, that Paul is thinking of when he writes these verses.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Paul is telling us why he's not ashamed of the gospel, so that the Romans now, then and us now, will be strengthened to believe, to support and to share the gospel.

So why is Paul not ashamed? How can the Romans and we not be ashamed of the gospel? Let's dig into the verse. First, the gospel is not foolish because it is good news.

[4 : 48] It's so easy to fear that when we're talking about the message of Jesus Christ, we can sound foolish, whether you're 16, 36 or 60. You can fear that when you're talking to people about Jesus and telling them about him, that he rose from the dead, that you're going to sound crazy.

That you may as well be wearing a t-shirt that says, I believe the earth is flat. And on the back it just says, I'm deluded because that's how people will look at you. I don't know whether you've ever had that conversation with someone, where they kind of just nod along or smile as if that's okay for you, dear.

I'm going to listen to you, but I think you're absolutely nuts. Or maybe you're listening online, maybe you're sitting here and actually, when you hear the question message, that's exactly what you think. You think, this does sound too crazy to believe. It's very easy to be put off, to be if you've maybe received that kind of response to think.

I don't want to risk that again. I don't want to risk being made to seem a fool, and maybe especially in a group of people. Our question's then fools to be pitied. There's a lot that could be said on there, but I want to argue that the gospel is not foolish because it is good news.

[6 : 00] The word gospel means good news. When an army won a victory, a messenger would go back and they would carry a message that was called, sometimes referred to as a gospel, which meant good news. Good news, a battle had been won.

There was a victory. Now the Bible writers, the apostles and others, they used the word gospel in a much narrower way. It referred to a specific message, about a specific person, Jesus Christ.

It's not then that you can add anything into this kind of good news. It's a package message about the person and work of Jesus Christ. So what is that message? Well, it's always helpful to look throughout the Bible to define gospel, but it's always helpful to look in the context of a verse.

You can never understand a verse properly in isolation. And Paul actually explains gospel right at the start of his letter. Right at the beginning of chapter one, Paul says, he says he's been set apart for the gospel of God, which is promised beforehand through the Holy Scriptures.

So there we go. We see already that the gospel isn't some newfangled idea. This is something that is part and parcel with God's plan from the beginning of time. But here's the key now.

[7 : 09] Chapter one, verse three, it's concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh. And declared to be the Son of God according to the power of the Spirit of Holiness by the resurrection from the dead.

At the heart of the gospel is Jesus Christ. Jesus who is descended from David fully man in line with all God's promises and expectations, but God himself displayed in glorious power as he rose through the death from the dead.

Jesus at the heart of the gospel, if you take away Jesus, you're left with nothing. You take away the gospel. Let me just push that further. You can say true things to someone about God's character. We can say true things about God's law. We can speak of God's love for a person. We can speak of the forgiveness that we can speak that someone could be forgiven. But if those things aren't eventually brought to the person and work of Jesus Christ, we're not declaring the gospel. Christ is at the heart of it. He's the fulcrum. He's the center. He's the foundation. He's the irreplaceable unavoidable heart of the gospel. And let me say that is a good thing.

[8 : 19] That means the gospel is good news. At the heart of the Christian gospel isn't five pillars of rules that you have to keep to be a Christian. It isn't a set of rituals that you have to do.

It isn't even 10 commandments that you've got to obey. It's a person. It's Jesus Christ. He perfectly displayed that character of God as he brushed shoulders with people as he lived life sharing food, weeping, celebrating with humanity.

He perfectly fulfilled God's law. We see that if you want to look at God's law, look at Jesus. He fulfilled it. He lived it. He displayed it. You want to show someone God's love?

Point them to Christ. God's love is defined in Christ. You want to explain forgiveness? Go to Jesus. He won forgiveness for us.

The gospel is not foolish because it's good news about Jesus, the son of God who lived and died and rose again for people like you and me. There's nothing to be ashamed of there.

[9 : 24] There's no skeletons in the closet that if you dig into the life of Jesus Christ, you find some kind of sordid activities or things that would mean that we need to be ashamed of his person.

If you look into his work, there's no part that's incomplete as we'll see in a bit. Jesus wasn't dodgy. Jesus was perfect in every single way. Even if you're feeling a bit disillusioned about Christianity, look at Christ.

God's people might let you down, but Jesus never will. He is as perfect as a flawless diamond. Look at Christ. The gospel isn't about rules and rituals.

If it was, we'd have a reason maybe to be apologetic and feel a bit embarrassed when sharing it. But it's about Jesus. There's no need to be ashamed of him. The gospel is not foolish.

It's good news. Second, the gospel is not powerless. It's dynamite. I wonder if you ever feel like you're wondering whether the gospel really works. Maybe you've been praying for family members, friends, brothers, sisters, colleagues for years and years.

[10 : 32] Maybe they've heard the gospel. Maybe at one time they've said they believe maybe they're now just hostile. Maybe they're indifferent. But you think, does the gospel really work? They seem to have heard it, but there's no change.

They've heard the gospel all their life, but there's no change. And at those times, it's easy to lose hope in the power of the gospel. You think maybe someone, they need something else, maybe what they need is a life or death situation to click them back to make them think again.

Maybe they need some kind of vision to convince them. Maybe they need some special experience, and that's the thing that will bring them to Jesus. Maybe you've heard the gospel lots of times yourself, and that's what you're thinking for yourself.

You're thinking, I'm not sure the gospel is what I need. I need some experience. Well, let me say the gospel isn't weak. You don't need something at plus the gospel.

The gospel is wholly sufficient. The gospel is powerful. We see that Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation. The gospel isn't just the message about Jesus and about the salvation he gives.

[11 : 40] The gospel itself is powerful. It's not just the message, but it's also the means of salvation, you might say. Let me explain the difference. Many of you probably, when you're on the ferry, see the Coast Guard come and do practices on the back of the ferry, and they winch someone down, and it's really exciting.

All the kids go to the back and me as well, and we watch and take pictures, and it's amazing. Well, now imagine you're on a boat, and maybe for some reason, you're on a lifeboat, you're drifting out, you can't see the land, you're in the middle of nowhere, and then you hear the steady thrum of rotor blades as the helicopter comes near, and you recognize it's the Coast Guard.

Now, if they are to drop down a message to you saying, we're about to send a guy, a man, to winch you up, that's a message of salvation. If they drop down a person, that's the means of salvation.

Does that make sense? Now, the gospel is a message of salvation, but it's also a means. The gospel itself saves. It doesn't just tell us how to be saved, the message itself saves us.

Notice that Paul doesn't say, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is about the power of God. He says it is the power of God. The very words of the gospel, God uses the very words of the gospel to do His saving, if that makes sense.

[13 : 05] Now, that's not actually unusual. God's been doing that from the very beginning of Scripture, as I was praying, as I was saying, from the first pages of the Bible, what does God do? He says, let there be light, and there is light.

Does God doesn't say, let there be light, and then He did something, and there was light. God's words themselves have the power to bring things into being. And that's the same with the gospel.

The words themselves of the gospel, as they are spoken in Scripture, as they are spoken by the power of the Spirit through us, His messengers. God speaks powerfully through those words and uses them to bring dead people to life.

The gospel is powerful. If you're not convinced of that, then talk to people, share your testimony with each other, and think about how you've heard the gospel and how you've responded to it. And I'm sure if you have enough conversations, you'll be convinced about how the gospel's made a difference in other people's lives. The writer of the Hebrew says, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword.

[14 : 14] The gospel isn't powerless. It's like a surgeon's scalpel that cuts into our lives. You might say it's like dynamite, actually. It blows our lives apart, and it reshapes them around Jesus Christ.

And if that sounds radical, that's good. Because if you start following Jesus, it's impossible that your lives will remain the same. If you're following Jesus, He will shape your entire life around Him. Because Jesus rightly demands that He is center of all that we do. Let me just give some implications of this first. Be careful about hearing the gospel.

If you don't want to follow Jesus, then you shouldn't try to listen to the gospel. If you're afraid of your life being shaped around Jesus, then you should leave here now. You should make sure that you ignore any person that tries to talk to you about Jesus.

And you should definitely make sure you never open this book. Because it's not just about salvation. God is a living and speaking God, and He speaks through the words of the Bible.

[15 : 21] That also means if you want to know God, if you want to be saved, if you want to come to Him, then listen to the gospel and read.

Because God promises to speak. God doesn't promise. You know, we might want to have some special experience or vision or something like that, but can I just tell you, don't wait around for that. Because you might be waiting your whole life for something that will never happen. God occasionally works through dreams and visions, but they're always accompanied by His Word. God promises to always work through the gospel, to always work through His Word.

He never lets it return empty. Look to Christ, look to His Word. Second, those of you who are Christians, don't lose hope in the gospel and think that you need something else.

Trust in the power of the gospel. Don't be ashamed. Keep speaking it. The words have power. Just read through the gospel, read through the book of Acts, and trace every time it talks about the Word of God spreading.

[16 : 27] And just look at there. See the example even there in history of God using His Word. And as it's spoken, people are saved. The church is transformed. People are scattered. The gospel goes out.

I want to emphasize the need to remember that words have power, because sometimes we can be deceived into thinking that words are optional. St. Francis of Assisi is often quoted as saying, preach the gospel at all times, use words if necessary.

The problem is that he never actually said that. I used to think it was a genuine quote that I looked it up. Apparently he never said that. He never said anything close to that. Now it's a good sentiment. Let me say that.

Our words speaking the gospel, the message of the gospel should always be accompanied by a Christian life that displays the gospel. We should always practice what we preach.

But it's never an either or. Paul cared about the Romans lived out the gospel. He spends several chapters in his letter saying that.

[17 : 32] But the gospel is fundamentally a verbal message. We cannot adequately communicate the gospel without using words. You can show someone's love, but you have to explain to them that you love them because they're created in the image of God.

And you love them because it's Christ's love that overflows them. Only then you'll be communicating the gospel. The gospel should accompany be accompanied by Christ like lives, but the gospel cannot be communicated without words.

And you know what? That's good enough. If that's good enough for God, that he's chosen to work through his word, then that should be good enough for us that we can trust in his word. Because it is powerful.

Brothers and sisters, we don't need to be ashamed of the gospel. It may seem foolish. It may seem weak. It may not seem to impact those who listen, but the words are in fact the power of God.

And they save. That's our third point. The gospel is not unnecessary, but it is life giving. Paul says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

[18 : 43] The gospel saves. Just let that sink in for a moment. God uses the gospel to bring people from death to life. I think we hear that. We know that the gospel saves and we don't maybe think what is actually happening.

When God saves someone, he takes them from a path that is utterly in the opposite direction to following him and he turns them around to follow him. He takes someone who is to all intents and purposes dead. That's why they're described as dead in their sins, who cannot hear or respond to the good news of Jesus Christ.

And he suddenly transforms them into someone who's alive. Someone who is no longer destined to be eternally separated in hell, but is suddenly having an eternal destiny of being with Christ for eternity.

He takes someone from where every fiber of their body is naturally inclined to walk away from him and disobey them. And he transforms them to make every fiber of them gradually more and more want to serve him and love him.

The gospel saves. God makes his business to turn rebels into sons and daughters. And each one of you who is here, who is following Jesus, is a testimony to the power of the gospel.

[19 : 59] If you don't believe that the gospel saves, just look around you, because God does it. Even if that's the only thing that you remember tonight, maybe it may be that. That's reason enough not to be ashamed of the gospel, because the gospel saves.

The gospel accomplishes what nothing else ever can, because it repairs the damage of sin. How does it do that? Well, look at verse 17. You can't really look at verse 16 without 17, because verse 17 starts with a 4. How does the gospel of God save?

Verse 17, 4, in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. Now, thinking about salvation in terms of the righteousness of God is really helpful, because it shows us how complete, how comprehensive salvation is.

Let me explain it in two ways. The first aspect of salvation, the righteousness of God is revealed as a gift, where God declares someone righteous. By nature, each one of us is unrighteous.

As I said, we're dead in our sins. We're unrighteous. If God is perfect, we're the absolute opposite. We're unrighteous. We deserve nothing but His wrath.

[21 : 13] When someone trusts in Jesus, Jesus takes their sin and He puts His righteousness on them. He closed them in His righteousness, and they're given the status of righteous. That's the declaring righteous.

That's the work, that's the declaring righteous. That's that work of God that we call justification, where someone is declared righteous. And that's a gift. The gospel wouldn't be good news if it was about our righteousness being offered to God, because we would have nothing to offer.

The gospel is good news because it's about God's righteousness offered to us. But salvation doesn't stop there. And this is where it's really, I think, encouraged me and hit home over the years. The gospel doesn't, the salvation, righteousness, sorry, salvation, we're not just saved, we're not just put on the track of the Christian life and said, you know, this way, off you go, do your best, get to the celestial city. God doesn't just start the process, He completes it.

As Paul will go on to say in Romans 8.30, those He justified, He also glorified. God's, the righteousness that God displays is also a transformative righteousness. It's a righteousness that changes people.

[22 : 27] And that's really crucial to remember in the Christian life. The gospel not only saves, but it transforms. When we despair of our sin, what do we need most? We need the gospel.

Because it's the gospel that will transform us. Basically, every pastoral problem that you come to as a minister, the answer is in some way that not remembering, forgetting, it's in some ways not having the gospel at the center.

You could say the gospel is the Swiss army knife to pinpoint, to work at, to address every single problem in the Christian life.

Because it's the gospel that transforms. Keep that in mind. Go back to the gospel when you're discouraged, when you're worried.

I mean, every circumstance, what we need to hear is the gospel. The gospel is life giving, it works, it's comprehensive. There's nothing left out. God never does half a job.

[23 : 30] Finally, briefly, don't be ashamed because the gospel is not intolerant, but inclusive. Christians and Christianity often accused of being intolerant, aren't they? Or of being exclusive.

However, the message of the gospel isn't intolerant. The gospel demands change. If that's understood as intolerant, then maybe the gospel is intolerant.

But it demands change. It demands change once you're part of Jesus' family. The gospel goes out to all. Notice that Paul says the gospel is verse 16.

The power of salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, but also to the Greek. Everyone is invited to come to Jesus. Whatever their race, whatever their gender, whatever their sexual orientation, whatever their culture, the demand and invitation of the gospel goes out to everyone. Whatever the person's lifestyle.

We don't have to change our lives first and then be good enough to have that, receive that invitation. The invitation comes out first. You take hold of that invitation. You take hold of Christ and then He transforms you.

[24 : 50] If you're without Christ, you don't have the power to transform your life. You can't make yourself good enough to come to God. You can't make yourself good enough to be worthy of it holding on to accepting an invitation.

The invitation goes out to everyone and it's when we take hold of Christ, He transforms us. The invitation to be saved, it's taken as we believe. It's for everyone who believes.

Believe in what? Believe in Christ. We believe in Christ when we trust that by His death, Christ's righteousness can be ours. That our sin is laid on Him, that He fully and completely pays the price for our sins.

Believing is more than just a mind exercise. It's about placing our whole trust on Jesus. It's one thing to know that Jesus died for sins.

Imagine a lot of you in here, if not most of you might say, I know that Jesus died for sins. But can you say I know He died for me? Does your life rest on that fact? That's the difference between a mental knowledge that Jesus died for sins or even He died for me and a resting life.

[26 : 04] Trust, faith is putting your life on that. You may have heard of the Scottish missionary John Payton who travelled to the Pacific Islands of the New Hebrides. The one who was warned that if he went there he'd be eaten by savages.

He said, I forgot his quote actually, he said basically we're all going to die. It's either going to be eaten alive or be eaten by worms. But anyway, when he was translating the Bible into the local language, he was struggling to find an equivalent word for faith.

One day he was coming back from a trek in the jungle with his translator and they were absolutely knackered. And they collapsed down on the ground and his translator collapsed into a hammock. And it was like a light bulb went off with John Payton.

And he said to the translator, tell me what you've just done. And the translator told him. And the missionary then shared with him how faith is exactly like collapsing into a hammock. And it's that expression in the local language that Payton used to translate the words faith and belief, which are the same words, the same word in Greek.

Collapsing your whole weight on God, trusting wholly in the finished work of Christ, giving yourself completely to Jesus, not holding anything back.

[27 : 19] The gospel of the salvation is the power of salvation to everyone who believes. Everyone who rests themselves upon Jesus, that power to save transforms and changes them.

Have you believed? If so, why not? All you have to do is rest your full weight on Christ. That's the only requirement.

Well, the requirement is to just let him do the rest in many ways, to place yourself in his hands. He's done everything else.

If you have believed, can I urge you to keep believing? As Paul says, he says, for it is the righteousness. So for in it, the righteousness of God is revealed, verse 17, from faith for faith. For as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. The Christian life is about resting in Christ from start to finish. Resting in the complete and finished work of Christ.

[28 : 23] We start the Christian life, trusting in Christ, and then we try to continue by thinking, okay, now I've got to earn it. Now I've got to somehow live up to this expectation. Well, then we're not living by faith.

If you're sitting here and you're worried that you wouldn't be able to keep up the Christian life, then you've forgotten that it's from faith for faith, that it's all by faith.

We come to Jesus by faith and then we continue by works. It's all by faith. It's all resting in Jesus. It's all his complete and finished work.

This is good news. This isn't good news. This isn't news that someone comes into the Christian family and then they're told, now for the next 50 years you need to try to work this out for yourself and earn it.

This is news that Christ has done everything. There's nothing to be ashamed of in the Christian message. You don't have anything to be ashamed of Christ, or the gospel, or the offer of salvation. [29 : 25] If you proclaim Christ, you may be told you're intolerant, you may be made to feel foolish, you may experience many closed doors and conversations.

Don't be ashamed. Come back to this verse. Come back and sit with God's people, whether it's having a coffee with someone in their house or on a Sunday, and be reminded that the gospel changes lives, that the gospel saves.

We have no need to be ashamed. Paul says, for I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God, for salvation to everyone who believes.

Let's pray.