

## **We need not be ashamed** **September 13, 2009 - Romans 1:1-17**

### *Romans 1:1-17 NIV*

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—<sup>2</sup>the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures<sup>3</sup> regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,<sup>4</sup> and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>5</sup> Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

<sup>6</sup>And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup>To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:  
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Paul's Longing to Visit Rome**

<sup>8</sup>First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.<sup>9</sup> God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you<sup>10</sup> in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

<sup>11</sup>I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—<sup>12</sup>that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.<sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

<sup>14</sup>I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.<sup>15</sup> That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

<sup>16</sup>I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.<sup>17</sup> For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

No one can remember it happening before. One lawmaker said in 29 years of service, he's never heard anything like it. Millions of people heard it and it caused the person speaking publicly to stop his speech and directly address it.

What was it? A two word accusation from a US politician directed toward the President. On Wednesday evening, President Obama gave a speech to US lawmakers about his health care reform ideas. Emotional debate raged over this issue for several months. Obama's speech was designed to address the issues.

It happened right after President Obama said extending health care to all Americans would not mean insuring illegal immigrants. That's when Republican Congressman Joe Wilson of South Carolina suddenly shouted out "You lie." Some immediately booed. Several in his party froze. They glanced in his direction. House speaker Nancy Pelosi sitting directly behind the president directed a fierce frown at Wilson. First lady Michelle Obama pursed her lips and shook her

head. The president looked towards the outburst and replied “That’s not true,” before going on with his speech.

Wilson seemed to know he’d blown it. He looked down and consulted his Blackberry for the rest of the speech. He shook his head defiantly a couple more times. When the speech ended he bolted from the chamber. Now of course his Democratic political opponents condemned the remarks. They called it “embarrassing, stunning, and disgraceful.” But even his fellow Republicans seemed ashamed of his actions. John McCain said Wilson’s behavior was “totally disrespectful.” The Republican’s house leader said “Obviously, the president of the United States is always welcome here. He deserves respect and decorum.”

Later, Wilson apologized. He said “this evening, I let my emotions get the best of me. While I disagree with the president’s statement, my comments were inappropriate and regrettable. I extend sincere apologies to the president for this lack of civility.” By late Wednesday, Wilson’s website crashed and he took a beating on his Twitter page. Wilson’s opponent in upcoming elections received a great boost. Within 8 hours of Wilson’s outburst, his opponent

received nearly 3000 individual contributions totaling approximately \$100,000. Time will tell whether the damage is done. But perhaps the most difficult thing is the shame felt by his fellow party members over Wilson’s actions.

To feel shame means we feel embarrassed, dishonored or disgraced over something. It’s challenging when someone associated with us does something embarrassing. Just like Republicans must deal with the shame of Wilson’s outburst, Christians sometimes have to deal with the shame caused by someone or something else. Sometimes, we’re ashamed because of the way another Christian acts. Their bad actions reflect on us. Sometimes, we have to deal with the shame cast upon Christianity because of something in history. Sometimes, we deal with shame because of the message of the Gospel.

Imagine yourself going about a normal activity on a weekday: at the office or job site, in class or hanging out with friends, at the playground, at a community meeting or sports event.

Now imagine there’s something called a shame meter attached to your wrist. Someone says “the Christian gospel is racist and intolerant.” Would you speak up? Would you identify yourself as a

Christian? In that setting, where might your shame meter be with respect to the Gospel? If 0 meant no shame and 10 meant lots of shame, how might you rate yourself when it comes to being ashamed of the Gospel?

Hopefully many of you rated yourselves a 0 or 1. But it can be tough battling shame about the Gospel in a world that tells us we ought to be ashamed of its message. But I'm here today friends to say "we need not be ashamed of the Gospel." My hope is by the end of this message, your shame meter will be lowered one or two or 7 notches from its current position.

We begin a new series of messages today from Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul is the same guy who wrote the Love chapter we looked at all summer. But where did Paul come from? In the late 30's or early 40's of the first century, Paul was a very religious Jewish leader. He believed Christianity was a heresy, a false religion. He feared God but he didn't accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah or Deliverer promised in the Old Testament. So he zealously hunted down Christians for the authority.

On his way to persecute Christians in Damascus, Jesus stopped him with a blinding light. Jesus told Paul that God had set him (Paul) apart from birth to be the messenger to the Gentiles or non-Jews. He would bring God's message of salvation to people beyond Judaism.

So within 3 days of that encounter, Paul became a Christian and began preaching. He ended up going on several missionary trips. He founded churches. His letters take up half of the New Testament. He wrote all his letters to churches he planted except one: Romans.

When he wrote this letter, he had not yet been to Rome: the capital of the empire. He writes to this collection of Christians about the Gospel. He needs to build some relationship with them before he gets to the meat of his letter.

So he spends an extra long time in the greetings section. It's like his business card. He identifies himself in reference to Christ and the Gospel. He's a slave of Christ and was set apart for the Gospel. He reminds them of the prediction of the Gospel throughout the Old Testament. He identifies the central character of the Gospel – a human descendent of King David and Son of God with power because of His resurrection. So Jesus came into history as a real person and is alive

today in heaven. If there's no real Jesus or no resurrection, there is no gospel.

Finally, he gets to the people he's writing to. Did you notice how he addresses them in Romans 1:7; "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints." He doesn't write to the church in Rome. Maybe the church was scattered all over the city in isolated pockets.

The Gospel likely came to Rome through Jews who heard Peter's preaching in Jerusalem at Pentecost. They brought the Gospel back and spread this message throughout the Jewish community. But ancient records tell us that there was a serious disturbance in Rome because of a man named "Chrestus" likely referring to Christ.

Thinking this was a local Jewish issue, the Emperor expelled all Jews from the capital in 49. They weren't allowed to return until 54.

Likely, Christianity continued to grow in isolated Gentile or non-Jewish gatherings. Then when the Jews returned, Christian Jews came within them. But it seems they had not come together. Paul writes to these scattered groups in Rome who had not come together as a church under Christ.

Then in verses 8-15, he explains his concern for them. He's prayed for them in thanksgiving because their faith is reported all over the Christian world. He hopes to come visit so they can encourage one another. In verses 14-15 he begins zeroing in on the Gospel again. These lead to our focus in verses 16-17. From these verses I want to give you 2 reasons why you need not be ashamed of the Gospel. Then we will respond to what we've seen prior to meeting the Lord at His table.

### **Why we do not need to be ashamed of the Gospel:**

**Reason #1 - It is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. Romans 1: 16**

But before we actually plunge into what that means, we need to define 2 words that seem basic to many of us. Yet Satan would love us to assume we clearly understand these terms. He has used any error to send Christians, churches and entire denominations way off track. So let's define 2 words: Gospel and Salvation.

### **What is the Gospel?**

*The word Gospel literally means "good news."* "Eu-angelion" in Greek which means "Good message" or "Good

announcement.” We get our word angel from angellion because angels were messengers. The word Evangelical comes directly from this Greek word. Eu-angellion – Evangelical – People of the Good News.

But what is the good news? Simply, *the Gospel is the Good News of the possibility of our salvation because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.* It’s good news because it brings salvation. A more complete definition of the Gospel comes from the 1500’s Reformation. At Easter in 2008, we did a series of messages called the Basics of the Gospel. One goal of that series was to enable us to define the Gospel in one sentence. We learned there that *the Gospel is “Justification alone by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.* It is found in Scripture alone. God alone receives the glory.

Since Romans is all about the gospel, we’ll spend much more time on this in weeks to come.

### **What is Salvation?**

The word salvation means deliverance from evil or difficulty. Salvation in the Bible means *“the deliverance of man from the penalty, power and presence of sin.”* Sin is anything we think, say or

do contrary to God’s will. There is a penalty for violating God’s will; God’s holy and just wrath leading to eternity in Hell. Biblical salvation points to deliverance from that destiny.

But we need to clarify salvation even further especially as Paul sees it through Romans. Many Christians look on their salvation as a past event. When I came to Christ, I was saved. God saved me past tense. That’s true. Salvation is a past event. At our conversion God saved us from the penalty of sin. That is justification. But that’s not all there is to salvation. We are still being saved. Notice in that definition “the deliverance of man from the penalty and “power” of sin.

Sin still exercises power in this world and in our lives today. But with Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives, we now have a new spiritual power to say no to sin. We are delivered from the overwhelming power of sin. In cooperation with the Holy Spirit we become more and more like Jesus. We receive a source of spiritual energy to live a qualitatively different life than when we lived under the power of sin. So we are being saved from the power of sin. That’s called Sanctification.

But notice the third part of our deliverance in that definition – from the presence of sin. Is anyone here today totally free from the presence of sin? No. That deliverance is still coming. The only way we will gain freedom from the presence of sin is through something called glorification when Jesus comes back. The dead in Christ will rise to receive their new resurrection bodies. Those of us still alive will instantly be changed and receive our resurrection bodies.

We will come through God’s Judgment day, the Day of wrath to the other side where we will enter into eternal life with the Lord forever. No one has experienced that future salvation. We are not yet glorified nor have we passed through Judgment Day. Christians don’t have to fear Judgment Day because we are protected by the work of God in Justification, Sanctification and Glorification.

Now here is the critical point for understanding Romans. When Paul uses the word salvation in Romans, most of the time he refers to this future salvation – the salvation still coming – our glorification; protection from God’s wrath and entry into eternal life.

*What is salvation? – In Romans, our Glorification, Protection from God’s just wrath on Judgment Day and entry into eternal life in God’s presence.*

With this future salvation in mind, we can now look at reasons why we need not be ashamed. I think this future understanding of salvation provides one of the greatest ways we can overcome shame for the Gospel.

Why need we not be ashamed of the Gospel?

Verse 16 – “It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” It is the power that rescues you from the penalty of sin at the moment of your conversion. It is the power of God that rescues us from the power of sin in our lives today. It is the power of God that will rescue us from the presence of sin at our glorification. There is no other power in the universe that can do that. It’s the power of God for the penalty, power and presence of sin. It’s the Gospel we all need now and forever.

Yet when you get out into the real world with real people outside of this setting, shame about the Gospel comes naturally doesn’t it? I know. For many years I was ashamed of the Gospel. Part of it

had to do with my personality. Part of it had to do with my own uncertainty about the Bible's authority. Part of it had to do with my desire for acceptance and fear of rejection.

I was terrified by verses like Mark 8:38 where Jesus says "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

But then I started to read God's Word through in its entirety in 1989. God used that to change me. Through His Word I discovered God's glory; God's brilliance; how it all fit together over thousands of years with multiple authors. So maybe God could use your reading of the Bible to reduce shame of the Gospel. Some of you hate reading – so find a way to listen to God's Word. You can listen to the Bible on line - download it onto your IPod. Find a way to watch God's Word through the word for word video productions of Scripture.

Or ask God to reveal the source of your shame about the Gospel and then address it.

But if we keep in mind the Gospel is God's power to deliver us from sins penalty, power and presence, our shame may lessen. I'm not

saying I have conquered the ashamed of the Gospel battle.

Sometimes, when I proclaim the essence of the Gospel, waves of shame come over me from this spot. You think that nothing happens spiritually during these gatherings? The enemy is working over time. I need your prayers to declare it fearlessly as I should. I see the rejection on faces. I sense the scowls during weddings or the turned down faces. There is a temptation to avoid the Gospel every time I preach. But I am convinced we must proclaim it every time I preach.

My presentation is far from perfect; but its not with wise or persuasive words that people will come to Christ. It is through frail vessels like you and me that God delivers his message. We need not be ashamed because this Gospel is the power of God unto the ultimate salvation through Judgment Day of everyone who believes.

Paul gives another reason in verse 17. Why else do we not need to be ashamed of the Gospel?

**Reason #2 – It reveals the righteousness God does in Christians. In it, the righteousness of God is revealed.**

But what on earth does that mean? To understand it, we have to define righteousness. Someone is "righteous" if they "meet

accepted standards of what is right and just.” But anyone paying attention to the world knows that the “accepted standards of right and wrong” are the subject of severe debate. Who gets to define the standard? That’s where Biblical righteousness comes in. One theologian defines righteousness as “the Christian teaching that God always acts in accordance with what is right and that he himself is the final standard of what is right.”

But we still have a problem in verse 17. The Bible describes God as righteous. The Bible calls Christians to righteous living. The Bible describes righteousness as what God does in our lives. Notice the Bible translations struggle with this. NIV says “A righteousness FROM God is revealed.” English Standard Version and New King James say “the righteousness OF God is revealed. The New Living Translation says “This Good news tells us how God makes us right in his sight.” So are we talking about God’s righteous character or the work God does in us to make us righteous?

From the rest of the verse, I think the case can be made for the latter. This is talking about the righteousness God does or works into our lives. Verse 17 concludes by saying “a righteousness that is by

faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous live by faith.” Now certainly there is a sense that we trust or have faith in God’s righteous character.

But it is not “by our faith” that God is righteous. It is certainly “by faith” or “through faith” that we receive God’s work into our lives. Remember the Gospel is Justification alone by Grace alone THROUGH FAITH alone. When we personally trust in Christ, God sends His Gospel into our lives “Through our faith.” To continue to grow in sanctification or holiness, we must by faith depend on Christ and the Holy Spirit to transform us. Paul writes elsewhere “I have been crucified with Christ and the life in the body, right now, I live BY FAITH in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” We look forward to our future salvation by Faith.

So we need not be ashamed of the Gospel because it reveals the amazing, supernatural, all powerful work of God to save people right into eternity. There is no power on earth that compares with that.

We need this perspective in a world that is incredibly skeptical towards God and the Gospel. Think about the recipients of this letter. They lived in the most powerful city in the world at that time. They

saw the legionaries march. They walked around the Coliseum and all the incredible buildings of Roman engineering. They saw defeated kings and queens come to pay tribute to the most powerful person in the world at that time. What power would the Gospel have there? No wonder the temptation to be ashamed arose.

The same thing goes for us today. When we look at our world, whose got the power? People see it everywhere *but* the church.

This was so obvious to me when I watched one of my favorite shows this past week: Cities of the Underworld. The host gains permission to go underground and underneath famous places. So in Moscow, he went underground to see Stalin's secret train tunnel out of the capital to his country home. In Berlin, he went underground to see some famous bunkers. The show this week focused on Las Vegas and area. So he went to the bottom of the Hoover Dam. Then he went underground the city of Las Vegas to view the flood-way they've been working on for several years. Then he went underwater in a man made lake in front of one of the hotels on the strip. This lake has a huge water fountain display with spouts that will shoot water 460 feet in the air.

At one point in the show he made some comment that Las Vegas is becoming one of the most powerful cities in the US. It's got money; a building boom; its population doubles every 10 years; It's got the Hoover Dam, influential people and entertainers. As I watched that with this message in mind on a surface level you ask "what does the Gospel have to do with any of that? How could it possibly penetrate there? Compared to the money, power, human ingenuity, big buildings and the attraction of sin city, the gospel seems puny. If someone introduced the Gospel to the movers and shakers of Las Vegas, they might say something like "You should be ashamed of that compared to the power of Las Vegas."

But all of Las Vegas' power is nothing compared to the Gospel: the power of God unto salvation through death, judgment and into eternity for anyone who believes. The Gospel is the most powerful force in history. The Gospel is worth dying for. No Christian has ever wasted his/her life by hanging on to the Gospel or remaining true to it.

We need not be ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation and it reveals the righteousness God does in the lives of His people. How might we respond?

### **How might we respond?**

**Explore the Gospel** – Will you read Romans this week? Or listen to Romans. Remember this letter was written to people who had less education than most of us here. Paul expected them to be able to understand it and grasp it. So whatever your experience with Romans in the past, I want you to give Romans another try this week. I will be blogging on Romans as we go through it. I want you to send me your questions or comments as we go through it. If you've never heard of the Gospel, Romans is a great place to discover it.

But I would be negligent if I didn't call you to **Accept the Gospel** – Repent of sins and turn to Christ. You see it's possible that some of you will die before next Sunday. If that happens, it's too late for you to receive that salvation we talked about. So now might be the day of your salvation. You accept the Gospel by admitting you are a sinner and under the penalty of sin. Then you turn from that sin and instead put your trust or faith in Christ. When you do that, God's Gospel surges into your life. You will be protected from the penalty, enter the

journey of salvation and look forward to eternal salvation. Will you trust Christ and receive God's Gospel today?

**Confess being ashamed of the Gospel.** Maybe we simply need to say to God, I have been ashamed of the Gospel, ashamed of sharing it, ashamed of trusting in it to free us from sin's power, ashamed of you, ashamed of calling out for God to work it through our community – instead we've trusted ourselves. I confess that Lord.

**Fight shame by asking others to pray for Ephesians 6:19-20 courage.**

<sup>19</sup>Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Christians, we need not be ashamed of the Gospel, even when others cast shame on it. Let us ask the Lord for His help, strength and courage to know what it looks like to fight shame about the Gospel when it rises within us.