

I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel

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- [0:00] Let's turn back to Romans 1 and fix our attention on Paul's words in verse 16.
- These are familiar words, but precious words too. For I am not ashamed, he says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, of the gospel of Christ.
- For it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
- And then at verse 17, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.
- And I want us to think about the subject that is in the forefront here of Paul's thinking. He says, I am not ashamed of the gospel.
- [1:02] I am not ashamed of the gospel. In Paul's day, there were practical problems that affected the Lord's people that could easily have made them ashamed of the gospel.
- They could withdraw and they could be silent and so on. And that has been true, of course, down through the generations. It's true in our own day too.
- The influences around us can make us hold back and not be prepared to talk about the gospel, not explain to people what it is, in case they'll just rubbish us and they'll think we're a wee bit soft in the head, as they say.
- Around us today there are so many philosophies and so many religious viewpoints and the influence of those who are secular in their thinking.
- All these can militate against us feeling free and comfortable in sharing the message of the gospel. And so we're in danger of being ashamed of communicating the gospel to the unsaved.
- [2:20] Just a few weeks ago, some of you will remember at the prayer meeting we had a short reflection on what we call the basics of the gospel.
- And I was saying at the time, it's good for us to stop and think about, if you had the opportunity to tell the gospel story just in a matter of a couple of minutes, what would you say?
- How would you put across the basics of the gospel? And the practical point in that was, the more we know of the many sides of the gospel truth, the more we know about the deeper aspects of what God was doing in his saving purpose in Christ, sometimes the more difficult it is to convey in a couple of minutes the gospel.
- And that in itself can be a hindrance, because we can feel, well, how can I get this across in a few words?
- That is a problem in its own way. But that wasn't the problem for the Apostle Paul. It wasn't that he was unsure of how to explain the gospel.
- [3:46] The problem for him was that there were so many peddling their versions of the way to know God, and the right way to God, and so on. That it was easy for Christians to draw back, and not to say anything.

The problem, too, was there in the community where the Roman Empire wielded such power, and people were afraid to risk it in telling the gospel story.

That is true today, too, in many parts of the world, where those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ are under pressure to be silent, and not to risk it and speak the good news in Jesus.

But we are reminded in Paul's words here, that there is something altogether wonderful about believing the gospel, and about sharing that gospel to whatever the obstacles may be.

And we have these words of his, I am not, he says, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, to everyone who believes.

[5 : 06] And it is for the Jew first, and also for the Gentile. And what I want to do for a wee while this evening, is just to consider this challenge that was issued to Paul.

A challenge to come and to declare the gospel to these folks at Rome. Now, I agree that it is not explicitly stated, but the very fact that Paul says in this great letter to the Romans, to the church in Rome, I am not ashamed of the gospel, tells us that there were those saying, he was ashamed, he was afraid to come, and to mix it with those who were in Rome, because there would be too much for him.

You see, earlier on he explains, that there are reasons why he didn't come. So, implicit in his words, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, is this, that there were those saying, Paul, you're ashamed to come, you're ashamed of what you believe about Jesus.

And Paul tells us here, first of all, we may notice, he tells us there were reasons why he didn't respond to this challenge, to come to Rome and declare the gospel.

He tells us in verse 11 there, he says, I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, that you may be established.

[6 : 41] That's one thing. And in verse 13 he says, Now I don't want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often plan to come to you, but was hindered until now.

So, Paul actually wanted to go there, but the will of God was such that he was prevented from going. Somewhere else he talks about, Satan hindered him.

Obviously that was in the will of God, in the sovereign purpose of God, but he saw Satan, in that case, as the instrument of hindering him. And here, he recognizes too that he was hindered, and he says, look at the words, I often plan to come to you, but was hindered until now.

It wasn't about not willing to go there. It wasn't about not willing to accept a challenge, or indeed an invitation, if it could be seen to be that.

No, no, he had been hindered up until that point at which he wrote. He wasn't ashamed of the gospel, and he had planned often to go and meet the church in Rome.

[8 : 00] If you think about it for a moment, one thing that has to be said about the Apostle Paul, from the time that he was converted, the time that he met the risen and exalted Christ on the road to Damascus, he was a man filled with a tremendous sense of debt.

I am a debtor, he says. I feel under this tremendous sense of debt to communicate to people, to tell them of the wonderful benefits there are in believing the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ.

He was impelled forward with this sense of debt, and he tells it to us here. Verse 14, I am a debtor, both to Gentiles and to barbarians, both to wise and unwise.

He felt this great sense of debt. He wanted to share the good news with them. It didn't matter whether they were educated, the polished people of society, or the unpolished, the rough and ready, or the refined.

To Paul, they all needed to hear the good news in Jesus. The coarse barbarian, the sophistocrat in the academies of learning, the thinkers, and those who were less trained in deep thought.

[9:37] It didn't matter whether they were the high and mighty of society, or the very ordinary. Paul had a sense of debt.

I am a debtor to them all to let them know the good news. One thing about the apostle Paul that is worth taking away from this, as we consider it, is that to Paul, it was always, woe is me.

Woe is me if I preach not the gospel, or maybe I can shift this around, woe is me if I pay not this debt. I am a debtor.

Having received freely from God and his grace, I am eager to go to every place that's possible to go to, to make known this good news.

Now, all that said, it doesn't mean that Paul had no fear at all.

[10:47] It doesn't mean that he hadn't a bit of apprehension. Paul knew very well the culture of the day. He knew the tremendous obstacle in the way of people giving the message of salvation a fair hearing.

He knew their thought patterns. He knew how they were drawn by Hellenistic and Roman culture. The environment, the whole environment presented to him as a missionary of the cross difficulties that made him afraid.

He tells us, you find it in Acts 18, you remember when he went or was on the threshold of going to Corinth, he was afraid.

He was very afraid. And the Lord spoke to him and strengthened him. Don't be afraid to go. I have many people in this city.

But he was afraid. So, we're not trying to convey the notion that Paul, in all that we've said, was without fear. He was without shame.

[12:06] He was not ashamed of the gospel. There was nothing to be ashamed of in believing the good news in Jesus. But he had certain fears as he would go into the arena, if you like, a hostile arena to declare the grace of God in the gospel.

And we ought to understand that. And if we've done anything by way of serious evangelism, we'll know that that's the way of it. We have a fear.

The fear of man is natural to us, even though it is a snare to us. It's natural. We fear. We draw back. That's not the same as being ashamed of the message of the gospel, of its power to save.

Then, too, of course, Paul was moving through a situation, particularly in Rome, where it was, on every hand, people were aware of the brutal force of imperial Rome's great military machine.

And it was seen surely most clearly there in Rome. But, you see, far from his fierce rendering him someone who would not go to Rome, he was a man who often planned to go there, notwithstanding his fears.

[13:41] But he was hindered because he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. And in a very real sense, then, who was better equipped to go to Rome?

Who was better to go than someone who relied entirely on the peace of God and the power of God as he went?

Who better for God to use than a man who felt his own inadequacy? We read in Romans who called himself the wretched man.

The man who, to the Corinthians, said he was utterly weak. The man who said in writing to Timothy, the chief of sinners.

Paul was a realist. Paul knew himself and his own weaknesses. But, you see, he was all the better for knowing these things because God would use them.

[14:42] And it's the same for ourselves in personal work and one-to-one in sharing the good news. it is always a challenge. A challenge we may fear at times.

But let's be clear, being afraid is not the same as being ashamed. He was not ashamed of the gospel. He was ready to declare it because it had become to himself in a living experience the power of God and to salvation.

and his weakness was actually the point at which God would strengthen him to share the good news in Jesus.

And it is important for ourselves to think about this and to rise to the challenges that present themselves to us in our own day, whether it's in our neighbourhood or among family or friends and so on.

There are great challenges that we may fear but we are not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

[16:01] I just use a wee personal note before we move on to the second point. I might have just said this to you before but never mind. I remember, I think Lena had a similar experience in those distant days when we were young.

We were taught from the paraphrases and we were taught gospel songs too to get the gospel into us in a memorable way.

And I had an uncomfortable experience that turned out to be a blessing. I have to confess that when I started going back to church and going as a believer having come to faith or a recruit then, I remember sneaking along so that nobody would notice I was really going.

I wasn't dressed the part at all and the Bible was nowhere to be seen. It was strategically placed under here. and I remember going along the street in which we lived and the words of a paraphrase came through my mind.

A paraphrase I had learned when I was younger. I'm not ashamed to own my Lord or to defend his cause, maintain the honour of his word, the glory of his cross.

[17:27] And that struck me like a bolt from heaven sent. And I was really convicted that I wasn't doing right. I was hiding. I was being ashamed to come out on the Lord's side.

And one looks back on that as a turning point in my own experience that I would have done with this covering and being ashamed to own my Lord.

And if there's only one person here tonight who's in that position, friend, listen to it. And listen that we're not to be ashamed to own him.

We may be rubbish for it but so what? He was rubbish. He was aided without a cause. And it's enough for the disciples as it must.

Even in this, even in owning him, we must own him. We must come out on his side challenged, sometimes afraid, but not ashamed to own my Lord or to defend his cause.

[18:35] And it's time then to be like that, to come out into the open and to declare yourself on his side whatever others may say.

well, that was the challenge to him. But the second thing, the gospel of which he was not ashamed. We've been touching on this a little but I want now to go into this for the second closing part of the word.

This is a vital point, you see. We have to understand things about the gospel that enable us to say this is the gospel.

It takes us back to what I was saying about if he had two minutes to tell people. What would you say? And we ought to do that. We ought to prepare ourselves to be able to give people the saving message in a short, sweet, and complicated way.

And challenge them to believe knowing that we're doing this in the Lord's name and by the grace of the Lord. Well, the first thing we want to remind ourselves is that we have good news.

[19:56] That's what the gospel is. Evangelion is good news. It's God's gospel. We read that at the beginning. Separated, verse 1, separated to the gospel of God.

It can simply be called the gospel, good news, or the gospel of Christ. And I want just to look at this for a few moments in terms of what the gospel is not.

It's always helpful to think about what it's not in order to narrow down to think about what it is. And of course, by thinking about what it's not, it helps us to be able to deal with people who have different views of what the gospel is.

You see, there are so many systems, and there have been so many systems down through history that identify themselves as Christian. Only they have not the gospel.

you only need to go back to your Bible and thumb up Galatians. And Galatians is about what the gospel is not, and what the gospel is.

[21:20] Remember what Paul says at the beginning, if anyone comes to you and preaches any other gospel, and that which I preach to you, let them be anathema, let them be eternally condemned.

These are solemn words. That's where Paul takes his starting point in the churches of Galatia, more or less modern Turkey, where another gospel, which was not the gospel, was already infiltrating the churches.

And that later is about dealing with anti-Christian error. It was brought in mainly by the Judaizing party that had come up from Jerusalem that basically had Christ plus as the core of their message.

That was their great error. They added to Christ's work, and rendered that work really not sufficient.

Christ's plus of the Galatian heresy of the Judaizers actually was no gospel at all.

[22:36] It wasn't good news. And in the church today across the world, there are many mainstream orthodox churches that have not the gospel because they have Christ plus.

there are some churches even in the reformed tradition who not exclusively I may say, but in the reformed tradition too, who have the view that at baptism a child is regenerate.

That's not the gospel. They have added to that the doctrine of what I might call effective human merits.

Sometimes we call it brownie points. That's not the gospel. That's Christ plus our brownie points. It's Christ plus these effective human merits by what we do.

That's not the gospel. It's adding to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, without being unkind at all, and I mean that, this letter was written to Rome, to the church in Rome, at Rome.

[23:57] And with a wee play on words, we might think about the modern church of Rome. And when we look at its doctrine, they use some of the language of the evangel, of the good news.

truth. But they don't subscribe simply to good news truth, to gospel truth. To talk about saving truth in that system is not saying that Christ's work alone is sufficient.

Otherwise, there would be no Church of Rome. It would be Protestant in truth. It would be Protestant and Reformed in its theology. theology. It adds.

It adds to Christ. It's Christ plus the Church. There's no salvation outside the Church, meaning the Church of Rome. It's Christ plus the prescribed ways of human merit, a very elaborate system of human merit.

Now, listen, this is not about, therefore, there's no Christians in the Roman Church. I'm not saying that at all. That's a different issue. what we're saying here is the core teaching of that system is a Christ plus system.

- [25 : 24] No different in its own way than the Galatian heresy, than the Judaizers insisting you must be circumcised, you must observe the Jewish codes in order to be saved, Christ plus.

God is a God and whenever we bring in anything that in some way human merit is used to manipulate God and add to the whole package Jesus plus, you've not got the gospel.

Simply that. God says, the good news for Jew and Gentile, for all alike, is that Jesus Christ alone saves through his cross work and through his resurrection as our prophet, priest, and king.

And, of course, sacrifice too. And, we simply receive Christ and the benefits of salvation by faith.

We rest upon him alone for our salvation. This is the power of God. This is not a theory that is equally good as other theories on the way of salvation.

- [26 : 48] This is the only way. This is the gospel. I'm not ashamed, he says, of this gospel, the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ, for it, and it alone, is the power of God unto salvation.

Actually, it's interesting here, where it says, for it is the power of God to salvation. That doesn't give you the sense of energy that's in the word.

It is the power of God operative unto salvation. It's living power, power, it's holy energy from God. It's not a dead letter, it is living power.

And people are never the same listening to it. If they don't receive it, they have become harder under it. people who are convinced of the eternal life that Jesus is, and he saw as he never saw before.

The very one I persecuted in his people, the very one I hated in his people, and thought to do so much against, Christ, is actually God's savior of the world to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.

- [28 : 13] And he saw that God, the triune God, applied that word to people, applied the saving truth in Jesus to people, and brought them out of their own darkness, righteousness, and opposition, and bigotry.

And he applied not only the benefits of Christ's death, but the glorious robe of righteousness we talk about, that we are dressed in as far as God is concerned.

We are accepted in the beloved. And you see, the glory and the power of the gospel is that God himself is in action, the infinitely holy God, the sin punishing God, deals with our sin in his own sin.

And he becomes the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. And from our standpoint, we as sinners see our plight, we are in the hands, to quote Luther, in the hands of an angry God, and we see that the way of our deliverance is in the Son of God's love, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And faith receives him in all his glorious person and saving benefits. The reformers talked about faith is the empty hand that simply receives the divine fullness.

- [29 : 57] And you know the reformers were very careful to point out that not even faith, as some teach, not even faith itself is meritorious.

When it is said we are saved through faith, Paul quickly goes on to the Ephesians, not indicating that the faith is meritorious, no, no.

It is by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. You see, he heads off any notion that even faith is meritorious.

It is the empty hand that receives the divine fullness in the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember C.T.

Stead used the anagram of faith down the way, instead of faith across, faith down, forsaking all, I trust him.

[31 : 00] That is what it is. It is forsaking all, all other fancied notions and religious positions. Faith is forsaking all.

I trust him. And I have to tell you, if you don't know it, that the Council of Trent rejected the reformers and refuted their teaching.

In fact, they called them heretics, and they called them heretics for their empty trust.

In other words, they had no place for simply empty hands, receiving the divine fullness. They called it the empty trust of the heretics.

My dear friends, therefore, let us affirm afresh, in Jesus we have received freely the divine fullness, the salvation of God.

[32 : 09] And that in him we have one who meets our every need of a perfect relationship with God that will never end. We have in Jesus one who has procured peace for us, and forgiveness for us, and a place, as we were thinking earlier today, among the children of God.

Jesus has accomplished what for us is mission impossible, and he alone, and only he, is man's merit, peace, and power.

And if we'll have him, that's the way we're to have him. He is our merit, he is our peace, he is our power. And let us have him like this, unashamed of the good news.

I am not ashamed, he says, of the gospel of Christ, for I have proved in my own experience, through the grace of God, it is the power of God, operative and to salvation, to everyone who believes.

And you see, it's with that in mind, that we can take courage, as we face a world that is hostile to the glories of the gospel.

[33 : 39] Whatever the religious perspective, whatever the philosophical perception, whatever the science position that is antagonistic to God, let us affirm afresh that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

We are not ashamed to own our Lord or to defend his cause. Let us look to the future with renewed vision and renewed faith in the Christ of God.

And in the gospel of Christ. This is, there is more than that, what I have just said, that meets the eye. We can believe the gospel for ourselves, and we cannot believe in its power to save so and so and so and so and so.

We need to believe in its power. Not just because it has touched ourselves simply, but because it is what it is from God's standpoint, his power operative unto salvation.

Let us not only believe the good news in Jesus, but believe in its power to save others and that our tongues may be loosed to tell others of Jesus, the mighty to save.

[35 : 01] Not in any presumptuous and self-righteous way, God forbid, but humbly recognizing that we ourselves have commanded its life-transforming power and we can commend its power and the power of the Savior to bring the people to whom we speak into a saving union with God.

May he bless to us then these wonderful words, for I am not ashamed, he says, of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God operative unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, of course, but also for the Gentile, for in that gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.

We come in with the empty hands of faith and we'll go on to the end the same way as it is written, the just shall live by faith.

Amen.