

Paul at this point in his letter is now done introducing himself. He has let the congregation know who he is and what he intends to do. And so now he wants to give them the main idea of what he's talking about, the main idea of the entire book of Romans. And so everything after these two verses is going to unpack what it is that Paul is saying. Verses 16 and 17 are basically the entire book of Romans in a nutshell. And if it takes a whole book for Paul to unpack what he says right here, there is no way we're going to get through it in just one night. So we have the whole book, the rest of this book, to fully understand all of the things that Paul is talking about in these two verses. And for that reason, I want to focus on one part of it in particular. Paul says: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

Now, why? Why would he feel ashamed? Why does he feel the need to defend the Gospel at all? You would think the Gospel is something that we'd be proud of, that we would feel no need to be ashamed of. But in reality, Christians, there are many reasons that we might be tempted to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

And the first reason is because the Gospel itself is offensive, or at least it should be offensive. It's offensive because of what it says about us. The Gospel tells us that we are sinners in need of grace, that we are people who need to be saved, that Jesus has come to deliver us from our sins. In a way, it's saying that we are living the wrong way, that we need to change the way that we live. And when the world hears that or when the natural person hears that, that's offensive. Nobody likes to be told that they're living the wrong way. Nobody likes to be told that they're doing something bad. Yeah, maybe I've got a few things going wrong in my life, a couple things that I need to fix, but all in all, it's pretty good. I'm doing the right thing. I'm living the way I think I should be living. But the Gospel comes along and says no, that's not right. We need a complete change, a complete change in how we think and in how we live. And for that reason, it can be offensive to the world.

And maybe we are ashamed of that because we don't want to offend anybody. We don't like to make people feel bad. We don't want anybody to be angry with us. And so we try to soften it up. Maybe we change the Gospel into something that it isn't, to make it more palatable to other people. Or maybe we just don't even say anything at all. It's easier to just be quiet, right? It's easier to just not say anything, to just go about your business, and let other people go about theirs. But in this way, we can be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because we don't want to talk about it with others. But Paul isn't going to be quiet, he says. He's going to preach the Gospel also in Rome, because he knows that all people need to hear it. That this is the Gospel of God, and even if they reject it, it's still something which must be proclaimed.

The Gospel is also offensive to us because it says that we're all on the same level, that there's really no difference among us. We all stand guilty before God. We all are saved in the exact same way. And the reason why that's offensive to us is because it means that our efforts mean nothing. That all the things that we have done ultimately count for nothing before the Lord, so that the smart person and the highly educated man is on the same level as the idiot. The person who works very hard all their life is on the same level as the lazy man. The person who is a good citizen, who has

done everything right, is on the same level as the criminal serving multiple life sentences or even on death row. All the things that we have done count for nothing before the Lord, so that no one is saved because they're better than somebody else. And of course, that's offensive, because people don't want to think that way. They want to think that they're different from other people. What do you mean that my education counts for nothing? What do you mean that my hard work counts for nothing? What do you mean that my good deeds count for nothing? That doesn't make any sense. How can you say that I'm just like this other person?

And so we can be ashamed of the Gospel, because, again, we don't want to offend anybody. We don't want them to be angry with us or to yell at us, and so we say, "Okay, we'll just be quiet and not say anything at all." But Paul proclaims this message without compromise. All are saved in exactly the same way: through faith in Jesus Christ, which is good news for all people.

We might also be ashamed of the Gospel, because it seems unimpressive to us. It's nothing flashy. It seems like something very humdrum, something very common. I mean, Jesus, for example, at first glance doesn't seem all that impressive. Just an ordinary man, a poor teacher from a poor part of the world who died like a criminal. It doesn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary. It seems to be very, very ordinary. And even the Gospel itself doesn't seem all that flashy, if you think about it. Because the heart of the Gospel is: "Repent and believe in Jesus. Call on his name, and you will be saved." Which might lead somebody to ask, "Well, is that it? Is that all you have to do? It doesn't seem like very much." You'd think it would be something a lot more complicated, something a lot more involved that you would have to go through. Because people will go through all kinds of things, no matter how difficult it may seem to be, if it means that they can save themselves in the end. If they can get some kind of secret knowledge, if they can go through some secret rites, they'll do it, because it means that they're saved. But in reality, the Gospel is nothing like that. The Gospel calls on us to believe in Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. It seems too simple. The world has much more impressive things going for it. But in reality, that's why we might be ashamed of it, because it does seem too simple. It does seem unimpressive. We want to change it into something else.

One last reason why we might be ashamed of the Gospel is because we don't want to associate with other Christians. Because those who are suffering, we see their suffering and say, "I don't want to suffer with them. I don't want to have to deal with that." And so we close our eyes and turn our heads away and not really look at them. Pretend we don't actually see what's happening, so that we don't get lumped in together with them. We don't have to suffer along with them. It could also be because of others that we consider to be shameful. Certain Christians who we consider to be bad examples or annoying people or the kind of people you don't want to associate with. And so we'll say, "I'm not like those other Christians, because I don't do this, or I don't believe that, or I don't hold to this, or whatever it may be." Anything to distinguish us from the rest of them, so that the world would say, "Okay. Maybe we'll accept you as a result."

But in reality that's being ashamed of the Gospel too. Because the Gospel is not just about my salvation. The Gospel is for the whole Church, for all people, both those we like to be around and those that annoy us. It is meant for all of them together, slave and free, rich and poor, whoever they may be. And Paul tells us that he preaches to both Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish, because he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

So why isn't he ashamed? He tells us, verse 16: "For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." This Gospel is the power of God. It's not the power of man. Paul does not say that "this is the power of men for salvation." It has nothing to do with us. It is not a power, as if it was one power among many. It is "the power of God for salvation." This is God's way. And God shows his power by saving us in this way. And so Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel, because this is from God. It belongs to him. This is the way he has chosen.

And this salvation, Paul tells us, is for everyone who believes. Everyone. For the Jew first and also for the Greek, so that all are saved by faith in the promises of God. This faith is not our work. It's not something that we do. This faith is not a precondition for salvation, like you have to believe and then maybe God will save you. This faith is a living trust in what God has done for us. It's not limited to certain groups of people, but is for all people everywhere who believe. And for that reason, there is no reason for us to feel ashamed of what God is doing.

Paul also tells us in verse 17: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" So God's righteousness has been revealed to us. The righteousness which is of Christ given to us so that we too would be righteous, that we too would be holy. We are no longer accused before God. Christ has taken our judgment upon himself. And God reveals this to us, because it's his Gospel. Yes, men may proclaim it. Men may say it. But it is God who reveals it. It is God working through us to proclaim that message. And so we are not ashamed of the Gospel, Paul says, because this is from God. It's his work. It's his doing. We don't want to be ashamed of God and of the things that he has done for us in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, I should say at this point, Christians, that it is possible for us to be not ashamed of the Gospel for the wrong reasons. We might not be ashamed of the Gospel, but for a reason other than what Paul intends. Because when we think of the Gospel purely in terms of ourselves or of our own experience, we're thinking of it in the wrong way. Let me put it this way. Maybe we would say that "the Gospel changed my life, that I was never the same after I came to know Jesus." Or maybe you would say that "I've never felt better in my life after coming to faith." But you'll notice what that's doing. It's putting it all on me. My experience, my feelings, the things that I am doing. And we try to make it appealing for that reason. "You should try it too," we say, "because then you'll feel just like I do."

But there's a problem with that, because you could claim that about anything. You could claim it about other false religions, saying that they changed their lives too, that they made a difference in

the way that they lived. Some of the most on fire people are people who believe a lie. You could say it about diet and exercise, that I went on this diet, and suddenly, I've never felt better in my life! Because it's all about how I feel. You could even say it about the things that you buy. I was listening to the radio the other day, and there was an advertisement for some cleaning products, and they said "It changed my life! It made my life so much better than it was before!" But that's the problem here. If we make it all about ourselves, our own experience, our own feelings, we're not understanding it in the right way.

So what does Paul mean, then, when he says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel? He is not ashamed, Christians, because this is God's work. This is God's action. This is God's Gospel, not ours. He is not ashamed of the Gospel because we glory in God and the things that he has done for us. He is not ashamed of the Gospel because we are thankful of what God has done for us in his Son, Jesus Christ. To put it in a nutshell, he is not ashamed of the Gospel because he's not ashamed of God. And that's what he wants us to see as well. That when we glory in the Gospel, we're not glorying in ourselves. We're not boasting in ourselves. We're boasting in the Lord who has done all these things for us.

So Christians, let us glory in the Gospel. Let us boast about what God has done. Let us not be quiet because we don't want to offend somebody. Let them be offended. You can't help that. Speak the truth of God's Word. And let us not be ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive us our sins. We thank you for all that you have done in him and pray that you would help us always to glory in you, so that we may sing your praises forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.