

16 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. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)

The Apostle Paul had just proclaimed his great desire to preach the gospel to those in Rome. He wrote of his compulsion to preach the good news to Greeks and to everyone else. What followed, in our verses for today, was a summary of the letter he was writing. It was verse 17 that spoke to Luther's heart and brought about the Protestant Reformation. Whenever we look at such a small portion of Scripture we must be sure to look at it in context with the immediate surrounding passages and then with all of Scripture. That assures us we are interpreting the verse in the context in which it was written.

Paul is explaining why he wants to share the good news that Jesus is the promised Messiah (verse 2), that He is both man and God (verses 3 and 4), and that we are called to obedience of faith (verse 5). But his emphasis is that this good news is for everyone (verses 13 and 14). Some of his fellow Jews were scandalized by the fact that Paul considered himself an apostle to the Gentiles (11:13). They believed one should become a Jew and obey the Law if they wanted to be blessed by God. But that is not the good news. Listen again to the first part of verse 16. *16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*, Who is to be the recipient of the gospel, the power of God for salvation? It is for "everyone who believes!"

Paul is not ashamed that the gospel is for the world. He goes on in this first chapter to explain why. Man is fallen. The world of man practices evil and is destined for the wrath of God (18). In the second chapter he makes sure that the Jews don't think they are in a different category, and points out that God isn't partial (2:11). We are all made in His image, and we are all fallen. We are all destined for the wrath of God. That is what justice demands.

Paul is not ashamed to tell us that the gospel is for everyone who believes. God is impartial. He won't hold it against you if you were born in Bangladesh. He won't favor you if you were born in America. He doesn't care if you are of Jewish descent or the blackest of Africans. The gospel is for you if you will believe. Paul is about to tell us that it doesn't even matter if you have ever heard of the Bible or not. Creation reveals this good news of God (verse 20).

Commented [notes1]: Romans 1:2 (ESV)
² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,

Commented [notes2]: Romans 1:3-4 (ESV)
³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh
⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Commented [notes3]: Romans 1:5 (ESV)
⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

Commented [notes4]: Romans 1:13-14 (ESV)
¹³ I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.
¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

Commented [notes5]: Romans 11:13 (ESV)
¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry

Commented [notes6]: Romans 1:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Commented [notes7]: Romans 2:11 (ESV)
¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

Commented [notes8]: Romans 1:20 (ESV)
²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Of course those who have the Word can understand more clearly God's plan and how He made salvation possible. In chapter three Paul will tell us that is the great blessing of the Jew, they received the words of the prophets (3:1-2). Jesus first came to the Jews and explained He would be their ransom (Matthew 20:28). They had the sacrificial system and all the shadows and types that pointed to Jesus. But to whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48). Paul can proclaim the good news of God because He knows the Scriptures and the life of Jesus. But that proclamation became alive with conviction and power because He met Jesus and believed.

Paul is not ashamed to tell his fellow Jews that the Messiah came to save the world. He is not ashamed to declare it to Greeks who consider the cross foolishness (1Corinthians 1:18). Greeks were considered cultured people. Anyone that did not speak Greek was considered a barbarian. Paul declares that Jesus came for both, for everyone! The prideful don't want to be associated with those who are not up to their standards, that don't behave in ways they think proper. They avoid mixing with the common folk. That was true of the observant Jew. They called those who didn't try to keep all the ritual laws, "sinners" (Matthew 9:11). But that is who Jesus hung out with, because God so loved the world (John 3:16). Paul is saying, "I'm not ashamed of that!" He is not ashamed because it is the power of God to transform the sinner into a saint. That is real power!

Paul used to be ashamed of it. He thought those Christians were the dregs of the Jews, not quite as intelligent as his kind. They welcomed "sinners". He didn't want them touching him as even the dust from them might defile him in some way. But when Paul met Jesus, and everything changed! He realized if anyone was defiled, it was Paul (1Timothy 1:16). If he should be ashamed of anyone, it was himself and his prideful behavior. Now that's the power of God for salvation! That's when we stop looking for others sins and start seeing our own. It's God's truth.

Have you been there? **Have you seen that isn't others that are sinners; it's you!** It's not that alcoholic next door that you don't want to talk to; it's you. It's not that culture you despise for their lifestyle; it's you. That realization makes you a humble and grateful sinner saved by grace. Paul is no longer ashamed that this good news is for everyone. Even if his former peers are ashamed of him, he's not worried about it, because it works! It changes lives. It makes saints out of sinners.

The world would like to paint Christians as the most intolerant lot that ever lived. The true gospel is the most inclusive of any religion. Yes, we call sin a sin, but we invite the sinner to believe and be saved. The world would call us the most arrogant because we believe Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6). They just leave out the fact that we believe He died for us and for the entire world to make a way for anyone and everyone who will believe by faith to have those sins forgiven and live forever in the presence of a loving, holy God.

Commented [notes9]: Romans 3:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Commented [notes10]: Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Commented [notes11]: Luke 12:48 (ESV)

⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

Commented [notes12]: 1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Commented [notes13]: Matthew 9:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Commented [notes14]: John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Commented [notes15]: 1 Timothy 1:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Commented [notes16]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Are you ashamed that it is for the Jeffry Dahmers and the drunk in the gutter, and that culture whose lifestyle you don't like? Are you ashamed that it is for the rich and famous and people in power as well? Paul wasn't. He knew it was the power of God to salvation for all who believe. It is the power that transforms us and changes the way we think and act. It is this power that lives in us that gives hope. It is a deposit of the Spirit that guarantees the work in us will be completed (Ephesians 1:13-14). **It is by that power that we say "No!" to sin and "Yes!" to the will of God each and every day.**

I remember at one Promise Keepers conference, a few rows ahead of me were some born-again bikers. They were covered in some pretty outrageous tattoos from their previous life, but they were praising God now. I'm not ashamed to call them brothers. If anyone should be ashamed of us it's Jesus. He's the perfect One and we are all a mess, but He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

Now what did Paul mean when he wrote, *to the Jew first and also to the Greek*? This message of salvation by faith was first delivered to the Jewish people in the Scriptures. Jesus came to the Jews (Acts 3:26). The Apostles were Jews. What we need to be clear on is that this does not mean that they receive some kind of credit for being descended from Jacob. The fact that they received the message makes them more accountable. Paul says they are the first to receive the wrath of God for the evil they do (2:8-9). Paul is being clear that the message came to the Jews. Their prophets recorded the Words of God. Jesus was a fulfillment of those prophecies. This is why even today we Gentile believers look back to what the Jews received from God.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." Romans 1:17 (ESV) This verse is so important, such a key to the book of Romans and yet it is a little difficult to translate. I think the New Living Translation does the best job of putting it in our vernacular. *17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."* Romans 1:17 (NLT) Paul chose one of a number of Jewish Scriptures that taught the truth of receiving righteousness by faith. He chose Habakkuk 2:4. He is not ashamed that it is not by works, and later explains that no one can keep the Law (3:20). Heaven is for the perfect and not one of us is. One sin is enough to keep us from a holy God's presence. One sin deserves justice.

In chapter four Paul will give another example from the Jews' history, Abraham. He believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness (4:3). You see, these are the discoveries Paul made during those three years in Arabia as he searched the Scripture to try to understand what he had missed (10:13). I have noticed that even in the Levitical Law, it is often repeated that it is the Lord that sanctifies us (Leviticus 20:8; 22:32). We don't do it ourselves by our perfect obedience. God does it through His Son on the cross. All we must do is by faith believe and receive what has been done for us.

Commented [notes17]: Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Commented [notes18]: Hebrews 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,

Commented [notes19]: Acts 3:26 (ESV)

²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

Commented [notes20]: Romans 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,

Commented [notes21]: Habakkuk 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Commented [notes22]: Romans 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Commented [notes23]: Romans 4:3 (ESV)

³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Commented [notes24]: Romans 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Commented [notes25]: Leviticus 20:8 (ESV)

⁸ Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

Commented [notes26]: Leviticus 22:32 (ESV)

³² And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you,

That is the Good News of God that was proclaimed beforehand in the Scriptures. This is how we are made right in His sight. It is faith from beginning to end.

This really bothered the Jews that had tried so hard to live a life according to the Law. Paul knew what that was like as a Pharisee. He was sincere in his efforts to please God. He just never understood how far short he was falling. Even if he kept all 613 laws, which is impossible, he would be violating the spirit of them in his thought life. He wrote about that struggle in chapter seven (7:15). In that chapter he describes the frustration of trying to please God by works and always coming up short. Chapter eight tells us the answer is a life of faith in the power of the Spirit of which we are getting a preview in our verses today (8:2).

The righteous person finds life through faith. He or she is made righteous by faith. Then by faith they live in that righteousness. They keep believing by faith that the blood of Jesus covers all our sins because they keep sinning until they die (1John 1:7). We are to be increasingly transformed into the likeness of Jesus, but we do not reach perfection here. And so **it is by faith that we live each day, trusting in the power of the Spirit to help us overcome, trusting that the Lord will finish what He started in us** (Philippians 1:6). By faith we believe He can present us faultless before the throne of God (Jude 24-25). It is faith from beginning to end.

The New Testament authors had a different sense of the word "life". Paul could write that the woman that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives (1Timothy 5:6). In other words, there is more to life than breathing. Life is to know God to do His will (John 17:3). Life is to have the power of the Holy Spirit. Life is being indwelt by the One that calls Himself life. Jesus distinguished it from mere breath by calling it eternal life. He said, *³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.* John 3:36 (ESV)

The ESV has a footnote for an alternate translation on that last phrase in verse 17. I prefer this translation. **"The one who by faith is righteous shall live."** That lines up with the teaching of Jesus. It also lines up with what we will read later in Romans chapters four and eight (4:16; 8:5). I know when someone calls me a saint or even jokingly says something about being holy it always makes me uncomfortable. That is because I know I am a work in progress and that it is simply by faith that we are righteous and have the life of which Jesus spoke. The life of Jesus is at work in us. That means the life we live is affected by Him at every turn. The values we live for are completely changed. We are His ambassadors, as Paul had written previously in this letter (verse 5).

I would be remiss if I didn't include that it is by the grace of God that we have faith to believe and to continue in Christ (5:17). Paul mentioned that in verse five. And this is why doctrinally we say that our salvation is by grace through faith. The grace of God reached down to us in our fallen condition and gave us the faith to accept and believe

Commented [notes27]: Romans 7:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Commented [notes28]: Romans 8:2 (ESV)
² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Commented [notes29]: 1 John 1:7 (ESV)
⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Commented [notes30]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)
⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes31]: Jude 1:24-25 (ESV)
²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,
²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Commented [notes32]: 1 Timothy 5:6 (ESV)
⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

Commented [notes33]: John 17:3 (ESV)
³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Commented [notes34]: Romans 4:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

Commented [notes35]: Romans 8:5 (ESV)
⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Commented [notes36]: Romans 1:5 (ESV)
⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

Commented [notes37]: Romans 5:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

in what Jesus did for us. Faith is the spiritual hand that reaches out and receives what Jesus did for us. Without grace we would never extend that hand of faith, for no one seeks God on their own (3:10). **Grace equipped us with faith, but we had to choose to exercise that faith that was given to us** (10:13). That is why none will have an excuse. The grace of God is extended to all. He is the light to all who are darkness (John 12:46).

We also have the freewill not to extend that hand of faith and receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior. God has made it so easy for us because it is His will that none perish (2Peter 3:9). However, He will not force Himself upon us. He graciously allows us to choose.

Martin Luther, as a priest of the Catholic Church, had been seeking to know he was right with God. The righteousness of God was a condemning thought to him. He knew he fell far short of that standard. His son, Dr. Paul Luther, wrote that in 1544 Martin told his family of his trip to Rome. With great joy he related to his family how that as he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the verse from Habakkuk came to his mind, the just shall live by faith. He immediately stopped praying and returned to Wittenberg. The verse became the foundation for his ministry. He understood what Paul wrote in chapter three. *²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it- ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* Romans 3:21-22a (ESV) His life was transformed, and Christianity was brought back to its roots.

Do you understand what dawned on Martin Luther on those steps? You can't earn your way to heaven. You can't do enough good deeds (3:20; Ephesians 2:8-9). Just doing what we should is no credit on our account. It doesn't negate our rebellious acts against God. He isn't like the Greek gods that just want you to do their wishes. He is holy. He is just. He must punish evil. But God has made a way. His grace has reached down to us and given us faith to receive the salvation He has earned for us. He offers us His own righteousness because Jesus paid for our sins (2Corinthians 5:21). The one who by faith is righteous shall live. **Have you extended your hand of faith, received the righteousness of God, and found life?** Are you experiencing the reality that your life as a believer is by faith from beginning to end? By faith are you experiencing Christ Jesus as your life?

Questions

- 1 Why must we understand the context of a verse?
- 2 Why is Paul unashamed of the gospel for everyone? Who was ashamed?
- 3 Should Christians be intolerant?
- 4 Why "to the Jew first"?
- 5 What was Paul's proof text?
- 6 What did Paul discover in the Scriptures?
- 7 What is Biblical life?
- 8 What is faith from beginning to end?

Commented [notes38]: Romans 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;

Commented [notes39]: Romans 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Commented [notes40]: John 12:46 (ESV)

⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Commented [notes41]: 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Commented [notes42]: Romans 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Commented [notes43]: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Commented [notes44]: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- 9 Discuss the ESV footnote for verse 17.
- 10 Where do we get faith?
- 11 How was Luther affected by verse 17?