

## THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part three

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Sunday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2074

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### STATING THE THEME OF ROMANS - THE RECEPTION AND EXPERIENCE OF THE GOSPEL

**Romans 1:16-17** - "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.'"

- 1) **PAUL'S AFFIRMATION** - "*I am not ashamed of the gospel...*"(16). There is a sense in which much is assumed in that brief statement. Paul *anticipates* a certain *reaction* to his open embrace of the Christian gospel. The outward presentation of the Christian life is so different from our past and so contrary to the world around it we can *expect* to be ridiculed. There will be *opposition* from the surrounding culture.

Think about this. Paul never imagined a world in which Christians would be mocked for their *hypocrisy* in *not* living up to what they professed. Rather, he anticipated the case where because Christians were so fully *committed* to living out a very radical gospel, the world would persecute them for their *counter-cultural* lifestyle.

So *pervasive* was this expectation in Paul that he addressed it over and over in the training of younger ministers:

**2 Timothy 1:8 and 16** - "Therefore do *not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.... 1:16.... May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains....*"

There are two related instructions here. First, we must not be ashamed of the gospel. We must constantly *expect* carnal minds not only to *reject* it, but reject and persecute those who *embrace* it. And *second*, we must accept a certain persecution for our faith, not as something *belittling* or *demeaning*, but with courage and pride. Paul's chains because of the gospel weren't a sign of *failure* or *weakness*, but evidence of faithfulness and a race well run.

Notice how Jesus warned His followers about the danger of crumbling under the world's pressure to be ashamed of their Lord - **see Mark 8:38** - "*For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*"

What shall we do with those words? We can't ignore them and hope they'll disappear. Do you ever give those words time to get under your skin? Do you ever picture - just as Jesus seems to promise - that there will be professors of Christ - *believers* in Christ - and Jesus will return, come face to face with them, and say, "I'm so ashamed of you." The text doesn't officially pronounce them lost or damned. Just, "I'm ashamed at the way you covered as you claimed my mercy and grace."

- 2) **THE EFFECT OF THE GOSPEL** - "*For it is the power of God for salvation*"(16). Rome was the hub of the world. It marked the best of the world's achievements, ideas, and philosophies. It represented all that was best and most advanced of *man's attempts to upgrade and achieve self-greatness on his own terms*.

To Paul, the unique feature of the Gospel was *it had the power of God in it*. This is vital to note. Religion is *man-made*. The gospel *isn't*. It could accomplish what man couldn't accomplish for himself.

When used in reference to the gospel **salvation** means **deliverance from the guilt of sin**. This is more than just **forgiveness**. The gospel means man's **relationship with God** is remedied and restored - **John 3:36** - **"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."**

In addition to deliverance from the **guilt** of sin, and in addition to having the **broken relationship** with God restored, salvation also means deliverance from the **power** of sin - **Romans 6:6-7** - **"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin."**

What does it mean to be **"no longer be enslaved to sin?"** Will I continue to be **tempted**? No. You **flee** temptation. You **repent** of sin. Will I ever sin again after conversion? If yes, then in what sense am I no longer a slave to sin? Briefly, we'll jump ahead of ourselves to see how Paul will address these questions later on in this letter:

**See Romans 6:11-13** - **"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. [13] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."**

The three key verbs are **"consider," "reign,"** and **"present."** These verbs describe the **process** of trust as it works its way outward through the skin and members of these present bodies. If all we had was the strength of our own will-power to accomplish these things we would be hopelessly defeated. But remember, the gospel, as Paul has so forcefully said, isn't just the **information** of God for salvation. It is the **power** of God for salvation.

- 3) **THE CONDITION OF RECEIVING THE GOSPEL** - **"...to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (17)**. Paul's direct reference to both the Jew and the Greek underscore the universality of the **"everyone"** earlier in the same verse. The religiously devout and the scorned pagan all need the gospel equally. Man's religious attempts do not make the gospel redundant.

Further, all can and must receive the Gospel by **faith**. It is for everyone who **"believes."** Neither Jew nor Greek can contribute anything else to God's salvation. Nobody brings anything in trade. Nobody is any more worthy.

But what does it mean to **believe** the Gospel? I believe many things. I believe that the earth will orbit the sun this year. I believe snow will fall sometime this winter. Is this the kind of belief Paul is describing? What parts of my being are involved in saving faith? Is belief rooted in my **understanding**? Does it come from my **will**? How are pride and humility related to saving faith?

Certainly we know that intellectual comprehension of truth - the knowing that something **is**, in fact, true - doesn't represent Paul's concept of saving faith. James makes this abundantly clear - **James 2:19** - **"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"** Devils aren't lost due to lack of accurate doctrinal knowledge.

The closest equivalent to Biblical faith is probably **trust**. To believe the gospel is to renounce self-righteousness, acknowledge the spiritually paralyzing effects of personal sin (hence the need for **humility**), and daily **trust** in both the **cleansing** and **empowering** effects of Christ's life, death, and

resurrection.

- 4) **THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL** - "...*the righteousness of God is revealed*"(17). It's important to understand what we're talking about here. Paul's use of the word "*righteousness*" here means, *not just the fact that God is a righteous God* - referring to His *character* (ie. He never sins). The "*righteousness of God is revealed*" in this sense: *the kind of righteousness God requires in those who would make an approach to him*. That is, the *kind* of righteousness God expects from *me*.

This is the Gospel: God *supplies* the righteousness He *requires*. God's righteousness is revealed in that God remains righteously just in punishing, not ignoring our sin. And yet God also *imputes* His righteousness, covering our sin and counting us just in Christ Jesus.

**See Genesis 22:6-8** for a powerful prophetic passage about this - "**And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. [7] And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [8] Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.**

What does Paul mean when he says the righteousness of God is revealed "*from faith for faith*"(17)? What do the words "*from*" and "*for*" indicate? These words carry us on into the next point. Paul portrays the power of the gospel, not only in terms of a *one time justification* of the sinner - the initial experience we call *conversion*, or "*being saved*." Rather, the power of the gospel covers past and present tenses. We are *justified* by placing resolute trust in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

And we move on in *present godly living* in that same abiding confident trust. Christ remains at the center of it all. Faith *develops* itself as it's expressed. Trust proved and rewarded is trust expanded and deepened. This is how the life of Christ grows.

- 5) **THE MARKS OF A LIFE SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL** - "...*the righteous shall live by faith*"(17). This is a slightly modified quotation from **Habakkuk 2:4** - "**Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.**"

This verse serves Paul's whole argument beautifully. "**Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him.**" This describes the one who is proud and self-reliant. He is "*lifted up*" in his effort to reach God. This is the polar opposite of the humble, reliant trust Paul has been describing.

Very quickly, here are some of the marks of saving, reliant trust as Paul presents them in his letter to the Romans. While we began this study late in chapter one, all of these traits come from earlier portions of our text:

- a) ***A zeal for spreading the Gospel*** - **1:9-10, 13-15** - "**For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you [10] always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you....13-15....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. [15] So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**"
- b) ***Deep joy in the fellowship of other disciples*** - **1:11-12** - "**For I long to see you, that I may impart**

to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— [12] that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.”

- c) ***An intercessory prayer life*** - 1:9-10 - “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you [10] always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.”
- d) ***A life marked by servanthood to Jesus*** - 1:1 - “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God....”