

The Powerful Gospel of God

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[0 : 00] I am not ashamed of the gospel.

It seems so offensive. How can I tell my father or my best friend or the new guy in my Bible study group that being a good or a religious person is not going to make you right with God?

Only the gospel can. I am not ashamed of the gospel, but it seems so simplistic. How can I tell my superstitious Catholic work colleague, my New Age uni friends, my Jewish neighbour, that belief in the gospel is really all it takes to get to heaven?

I'm not ashamed of the gospel, but it seems so impractical. How can I suggest to the world's poor and my friend who just broke up with her boyfriend and the woman across the street who's just had her third miscarriage that their deepest need is not food or self-esteem or human comfort, but the gospel.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel. But it seems so basic. How can I continue to teach it over and over again to my Bible study group or to this congregation or to the elderly Christians that I visit in their homes who know it by now?

[1 : 37] Won't they want me to move on from the gospel to deeper things? I am not ashamed of the gospel.

But it can seem so weak compared to the power of wealth or of the media or the government. How can the gospel be the thing that will make a difference?

I'm not ashamed of the gospel. But it can be so isolating. That's why I couldn't tell the truth to my mates the other day when they asked me why I wear this fish around my neck and why I said, it's just a fish.

I didn't want to be seen as different. Am I ashamed of the gospel? Well, have you ever been tempted to be ashamed of the gospel?

Perhaps the Apostle Paul was facing the temptation of being ashamed of the gospel as he began to write this letter to the Christians in Rome around 57 AD.

[2 : 54] Rome was the centre of the Gentile or pagan world of the first century. It was the seat of power for the emperor. It was a place of wealth, of religious idolatry, of strong social expectations and pressure.

And yet Paul wanted to preach in this opulent city a man who, as St. Chrysostom wrote, was thought to be the carpenter's son who was brought up in Judea in the house of a poor woman who had no bodyguards, who was not encircled in wealth, but even died as a culprit with robbers and endured many other inglorious things.

Was Paul tempted to be ashamed of preaching the weakness of a crucified Messiah in the powerful city of Rome? More than this, Paul had not founded the Roman church and had not been able to visit them earlier in his ministry, perhaps because of a previous emperor's expulsion of all the Jews from Rome.

The church at Rome probably started when Jews from Rome were in Jerusalem at the day of Pentecost and they heard the gospel preached and they believed and they went home and they started different churches in their houses across the city.

Perhaps the apostle Peter also visited there to minister to these Jewish Christians in the years following. We're not sure. But we do know that in chapter 15 of Paul's letter to the Romans, verse 20, he tells them that he didn't like to build on someone else's foundation.

[4 : 45] He wanted to go where the gospel had not been preached. This was not his church. Was Paul tempted to be ashamed of bringing the same gospel message that had already been heard in this church in Rome?

And the church of Rome was no longer just a Jewish church, but more a mixed, or indeed, as many, as I said, Jewish Christians were thrown out of Rome in 49 AD.

Maybe it was even more a Gentile church by the time Paul wrote this letter. And we can see from the first 15 verses of our chapter today that as the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles sent to tell the gospel to non-Jewish people, Paul was eager to visit all God's beloved in Rome.

He'd been praying for it. He'd been thanking God for these Gentile Christians, but he wanted to visit them all, Jew and Gentile alike. I think, in fact, the unity of the Gentile and Jewish Christians was very much on Paul's mind as he wrote this letter.

And we can see in chapter 15 that at the time of writing, Paul was about to travel to Jerusalem to deliver a financial gift that he had collected from the Gentile churches to give to the Jewish Christians who were very poor at that time.

[6 : 18] And he can sense that he's anxious that the Jews accept this gift and its Gentile givers. But he's aware that receiving money from non-Jews would be a very confronting thing for the Jewish Christians to do and also for their still-Jewish, not-Christian friends and associates.

It would cause great tension, perhaps even rejection for Paul. Therefore, we read that one of his reasons for wanting to visit Rome is so that the Christians there might refresh him after his experience in Jerusalem, whatever it turned out to be, and that the Christians in Rome could then send him on his way with everything that he needed to go to Spain so that he could indeed continue to preach the gospel where it hadn't been heard before.

And so as he writes to the Christians in Rome, much of what he writes, and we'll see this both in the first eight chapters that we do in this series and later on in the year, particularly in 9 to 16, much of what he writes is about the equal standing of Jews and Gentiles before God, their equal need of salvation in Jesus, and the unity they ought to have in the gospel.

So, was Paul tempted to be ashamed of a message that called for such transformation in ethno-religious relationships?

Well, the answer to all these questions is clear, isn't it? If Paul was tempted to be ashamed, then he never succumbed. In fact, he writes in verse 15 of chapter 1 that he is eager to proclaim the gospel in Rome.

[8 : 18] He can't wait. And he says he is a debtor to the non-Jews, the Greeks and the barbarians in Rome because he carries a gospel treasure for them with which he has been entrusted by God.

And it's theirs. He's in their debt until he delivers it to them. He's driven on. He's obligated to them. Nothing can stop him until this debt is paid over.

Their faith has been heard of around the world. I mean, why wouldn't it? Christians in the most pagan place. Fantastic. And Paul knows that if he comes there and preaches the gospel to them, an even greater harvest will result.

not simply in the form of more converts, but also in the strengthening and growth of more spiritual fruit in the Roman Christians' lives.

And we read that in verses 11 to 13. And so with this confidence, this eagerness, this sense of debt, he writes in verse 16, for I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[9 : 49] So what then is this gospel of which Paul is so confident, so proud, so unashamed? What is the content of this good news that makes him so willing to risk confrontation with Jews, to put up with the potential of ridicule by rich Romans and to preach where others have already preached before?

Well, verses 1 to 6 tell us exactly what this gospel is. And you might want to have a look if you've got your Bibles open, page 913. And in fact, these six verses answer six questions about this powerful gospel.

They are, what is its origin? What is its attestation, its verification, evidence? What is its substance? What is its purpose?

Who is it for? And what is its ultimate goal? So firstly, what is the gospel's origin?

Well, verse 1 tells us it is the gospel of God. Its origin is God. The good news that Paul preached and that we continue to read, to hear from the scriptures is no human message, no religion made up in the minds of men or women.

[11 : 21] It's from God. It's his idea. It's been revealed by him at his initiative. And it's been entrusted by God to the apostles and to us.

Leon Morris once wrote, God is the most important word in this epistle, this letter. Why did he say that?

Well, the word God occurs 153 times in Romans and that's an average of once every 46 words. That's a lot. But more than that, every theme that Paul discusses in this great letter is not dealt with in abstract.

It's related back to God. What is sin? It's rebellion against God. What is law?

It's the way of God. What does Christ do? He brings about the righteousness of God as we'll see later. The origin of the gospel is God.

[12 : 37] That's a great reason to have confidence in it. Secondly, what is the gospel's attestation, its proof, its verification? Well, have a look in verse 2.

It's the Old Testament. Verse 2, the gospel which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Do you remember, if you've read some of the gospels, people called Simeon and Anna and they're written about in the gospel of Luke and do you remember what it says, how they were described?

Well, they were devout Jews and they are described as Simeon looking for the consolation of Israel and Anna looking for the redemption of Israel.

Israel. Why were they looking? Because the Old Testament scriptures told them to. They had promised that the Messiah was going to come and these devout Jewish people were looking.

They were waiting. They were searching. They had read the scriptures and they knew that God would do what he had promised. And so when they saw the child Jesus, Simeon and Anna both knew that they had found what they had been looking for.

[14 : 04] The consolation of Israel, the redemption of Israel in Jesus Christ. Jesus was no novelty, no new religious thinker.

he was the one, capital O, who had always been promised. Great David's greater son said by the prophet Samuel and seen in the Psalms.

The suffering servant of the Lord written about in Isaiah. The son of man seen in a vision by Daniel. Some of these scriptures were written hundreds, thousands of years before Christ and yet they spoke of him and only him.

The attestation of the gospel is scripture. Thirdly, what is the substance of the gospel? What is it all about?

Verses 3 and 4 tell us, it is the gospel concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection of the dead, from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[15 : 22] The essence of the gospel is Jesus Christ. John Calvin wrote, the whole gospel is contained in Christ. Therefore, to move even a step from Christ means to withdraw oneself from the gospel.

That seems so self-evident, doesn't it? That we really could just conclude there. But the fact is that some Christians have moved away from Jesus as the centre of the good news.

They haven't got rid of Jesus from their faith. But when they preach the good news, when they tell people they've got good news for them, are they telling them about Jesus?

For some, the good news is that God loves you just as you are. For others, the good news is that life can have greater meaning, greater purpose, greater potential if you're a Christian.

For some, the good news is that you can be healed, set free. For others, the good news is that the world can be made a better place for the poor and marginalised.

[16 : 39] Now, these things are not wrong, but they are not the good news, capital G, capital N. The good news is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, who, firstly, was the human descendant of David promised, as we just heard, the one who would come to perfectly rule over God's people and usher in God's kingdom.

And secondly, the powerful son of God declared or shown to be such when he was raised from the dead. Now, even though our NRSV Bibles have a little S for spirit in this verse, the spirit of holiness, I think it's likely that Paul is talking about the Holy Spirit here because later in Romans, in chapter 8, verse 11, he talks about the spirit, capital S, of him, God, who raised Jesus from the dead.

And it's a similar idea here, isn't it? Jesus was the son of God from eternity, yes, but when he was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit, this was shown, he was shown to be the son of God beyond a shadow of a doubt.

People don't get raised from the dead, but the son of God is raised from the dead and is exalted at the right hand of the father. This Jesus, weak and powerful, incarnate, exalted, is the substance of the gospel.

[18 : 17] The Lord Jesus is the core. And if we teach about good news without centering our words on the risen Lord Jesus, even if we share with our friends, I think, about what great stuff being a Christian can do for you without talking about Jesus, then we're missing the core of what the gospel is, the substance.

It's great to tell people how great it is to be a Christian and what God can do for them because he's God, he's powerful. But make sure you talk about Jesus because he's the core.

Fourthly, what is the purpose of the gospel? The purpose of the gospel is what Paul writes as the purpose of his apostleship.

It's to bring about, in verse five, it's to bring about the obedience of faith. This phrase obedience of faith doesn't refer to kind of signing up to a list of doctrinal statements which is the faith and it certainly doesn't refer to obedience to God's law as being the way to salvation.

contradiction. You don't have to read much further on in Romans to work out that Paul would be seriously contradicting himself if that's what he was trying to say here. No. The proper response to the gospel, to this good news about Jesus Christ who lived the perfect life, died on the cross, was raised to life and reigns in glory, the proper response to this gospel is faith, a trust that God's good gift of Jesus Christ is exactly what I need to be forgiven of my sins and to be set right with God.

[20 : 16] And such faith is the obedience that God requires of us. He asks us to trust him and love him with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength in response to his gracious initiative in revealing his glory and goodness in Christ.

And when we do trust him, when we have faith in him, it leads to obedient lives, doesn't it? I don't know if you've ever used that diagram with someone that you're trying to explain about good works and salvation and you write good works and salvation and salvation and good works on a page and you draw an arrow.

Good works leads to salvation? No, big cross. But salvation leads to good works? Yes. Yes, it does. But it's just a flow on.

It's faith that God is asking of us. faithfully, who is the gospel for? What is its scope?

We've spoken about this earlier, but Paul clearly says here that he was given grace and apostleship for the Gentiles, or another way of writing that would be the nations, all the nations.

[21 : 46] The gospel, in fact, is an international message. It doesn't require a certain language, a certain background. it requires faith.

It's for every human. It's for Jew, non-Jew alike. The gospel is for all the nations. Its scope is as big as the whole world.

And sixthly, what is the ultimate goal of the gospel? It is for the sake of Christ's name, his glory.

When we glorify Jesus, we are glorifying God, and that is the ultimate purpose of our existence. Have you heard that short summary that the Westminster Confession says, the chief end or the chief purpose of human life, the chief end of man, is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

That is what the gospel does. God is beyond our imagining.

[23 : 04] I have to say that I have thought of God in my brain as a guy that sits up in the sky. But he's not like that.

I'm sure you've never thought that way. God is beyond our imagining. He is immortal, invisible, dwelling in inapproachable light.

He is perfect. He is worthy. He is beautiful. He is good. He is true. He is kind. He is righteous. He is powerful.

He is holy. He is creative. He is strong. And so it is so good for us and so right for us to glorify him.

It is absolutely what we were created to do. And Paul says we do this by glorifying the Lord Jesus. You remember what he wrote when he wrote to the Philippian church in chapter 2 of Philippians verses 9 to 11 talking about Jesus.

[24 : 09] Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name so so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

This is the ultimate goal of the gospel of God. That by believing the evidence of the scriptures believers which attest to Jesus son of David son of God all the nations would glorify God in Christ through faith in him and the obedience that flows from faith.

So this is the essence of the gospel that is the power of God for salvation. Let's ask one final question of it. How does this gospel save?

We know it's about Jesus and that we're supposed to respond to it by faith but how does it save us? The answer of course is in verse 17.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes for or because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written the one who is righteous will live by faith.

[25 : 49] The good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus saves us because by it God gives to us what he demands of us.

by the gospel God gives to us what he demands from us. What do I mean?

I've already said that God is perfect and holy and good. He's altogether righteous. We are not. In fact we are the exact opposite.

We are unrighteous, unholy, imperfect and corrupt in our nature. We might manage to do a good deed every Tuesday morning but that doesn't change the fact that we are by nature unrighteous because of our rebellion against him when we live for ourselves Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday afternoon.

If God is righteous and we are unrighteous then we can never enter his presence and in fact if justice, true justice is to be served, we are lined up for punishment for our rebellion.

[27 : 08] That's what it means for God to be righteous, to punish wrong. God's righteousness therefore means that his wrath, his anger is kindled against us.

We read that in the next verse after our passage today, verse 18. And we are set for judgment and punishment. judgment. So then how is this good news that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel?

Here's the answer. God demands righteousness and we don't have it. So the only hope for us is that God himself would give us the righteousness that he demands.

that would be good news. That would be gospel. That would be like expecting a slap and getting a kiss. And that is what he does.

What is revealed in the gospel is the righteousness of God for us that he demands from us. The reason the gospel is the power of God for salvation is because in it God reveals a righteousness that he's giving to us to satisfy the righteousness that he demands from us.

[28 : 34] What we had to have but could not create or supply or perform, God gives us freely his own righteousness, the righteousness of God.

Jesus Christ, the righteous man, takes our unrighteousness and our punishment and in its place God gives us Jesus' righteousness, God's own righteousness.

Because of this, the end time verdict about us, what God is going to say on judgment day about us, even though we have rebelled against him constantly in thought, word and deed.

The end time verdict has been changed when we believe the gospel because we are given God's righteousness for us to satisfy what he demands from us and we are set completely right with him.

We'll get to explore that transaction, that concept more as the weeks go by in this series. So how do we access such a gift of God's righteousness for us to satisfy what he demands of us?

[29 : 59] It is simply by faith, by trusting that what God has in Jesus was for us and is enough for us and submitting to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

it is simple but not simplistic. Yes, basic but profound and it remains about faith for as long as you or I live.

It's from faith to faith or from faith from first to last as the NIV translates that. The gospel is not only powerful to bring belief, you know, to get someone to become a Christian.

Who's Paul talking to? He's talking to believers. He's talking about the gospel bringing believers right the way to the end for a joyful eternity with God.

That's the power of the gospel for salvation of all who believe. to end this passage Paul quotes from Habakkuk an Old Testament prophet chapter 2 verse 4 the righteous will live by his faith and he wants to show that this is no new thing that he's telling them just as it was promised beforehand in the holy scriptures for as it is written the righteous will live by faith.

[31 : 34] Maybe an easier way to understand how that links back to what Paul has just said is to understand the phrase of saying the person who is made righteous by faith shall live.

The person who is made righteous by faith shall live. in its context in Habakkuk Habakkuk the prophet was complaining to God because God intended to raise up the ruthless Babylonians to punish Israel and Habakkuk couldn't believe that God would use the wicked to punish the wicked but God's answer to Habakkuk was that if he wanted to be saved if Israel wanted to be saved that it would be by the same means as he had always taught them as had always been revealed to them whereas the proud Babylonians would fall the righteous Israelite would live by his faith that is by his humble steadfast trusting God it would be faith that would make the Israelite righteous and those who are righteous will receive the life that God has promised Abraham the same what do we read in

Genesis that he was justified by his faith in God his trust that God had it all in control and Paul does go on to talk about Abraham in chapter 4 of Romans and we'll see that later on in this series but this is the gospel in its Old Testament shadow the person who is made righteous by faith shall live by faith in whom Jesus Christ son of God son of David declared to be the powerful son of God by his resurrection from the dead well this week you will be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ I will be tempted we will be tempted to consider it offensive simplistic impractical basic weak isolating but friends meditate on these words from

Romans chapter 1 and I know that you will find far from it being an offence to be avoided it is a gift to offer rather than being simplistic the gospel cuts to the core of who God is who we are and how we can be reconciled rather than being impractical the gospel actually offers us the greatest sustenance the greatest comfort the greatest hope that anyone could ever ask for rather than being basic remind yourself that salvation is by faith from first to last that God's righteousness comes to us by faith as we continue to meditate on the words remember that rather than being weak the gospel is the power of

God to cancel your sin to break its power and to bring you to eternity safely with God and finally rather than being isolating or embarrassing the gospel is God's truth attested to by the scriptures about the Lord Jesus Christ that will bring you and all who believe from any nation into the people of God who will bring glory to him by the obedience of faith but perhaps as you meditate on these words this week as I hope you will you will have the experience that Martin Luther records he says I'd been captivated with an extraordinary ardour for understanding Paul in the epistle to the Romans but a single word in chapter one verse seventeen in it the righteousness of God is revealed stood in my way for I hated that word righteousness of God which I had been taught to understand is the righteousness with which

[36 : 13] God punishes the unrighteous sinner thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience nevertheless I beat importunately upon Paul at Romans one seventeen most ardently desiring to know what Saint Paul wanted at last by the mercy of God meditating day and night I gave heed to the context of the words namely in it the righteousness of God is revealed as it is written he who through faith is righteous shall live there I began to understand that the righteousness of God is righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates let's pray

Lord our God we can't thank you enough for the wonderful gospel about your son so clearly attested to in the scriptures with such a huge scope for all the world that will bring you glory by bringing about the obedience of faith Lord we long to bring you glory we long to be unashamed of this gospel and we long to know deep in our hearts the amazing truth that you have given to us what you have demanded from us namely your righteousness we thank and praise you we ask you to continue to stir our hearts if we are unsure uncertain of what this means to us would you make it clear

Lord would you draw us to yourself would you help us would you give us the gift of your faith that is the obedience that you require so that we might truly know that we are justified by your righteousness we might know that we are all together born again and we might feel that we have entered paradise itself through open gates we pray in the Lord Jesus Christ's name Amen