

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

4/13/25

Sermon Title: “Ashamed of the Gospel?”

Sermon Text: Romans 1:14-17

Rom. 1:14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

Rom. 1:15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Rom. 1:16 ¶ 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.

Rom. 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Main Point: We should embrace the gospel message of salvation for sinners as the ultimate expression of the righteousness and power of God.

Outline:

1. The Temptation to be Ashamed of the Gospel (1:15-16a)
2. The God Whose Gospel Saves (1:16b)
3. The Gospel Comes By Faith (1:17)

Introduction (1:14)

Today’s passage takes us from Paul’s introduction to the real body of his letter to the Romans. Up to this point he’s spoken about himself, his own bonafides, and his own calling by God. Paul is reminded us that the gospel is about Jesus, who was

promised beforehand in the Scriptures, the son of David, the Son of God, crucified, dead, buried, and raised up.

He's told the Romans that it is his ambition to preach Jesus Christ throughout the world, and of his desire specifically to bless these saints in Rome, not just by throwing letters at them from a distance but by actually going to them and being with them, so he can bless them.

And then he gets to verse 14, which begins our reading today where he says, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish."

So here he is, and he's explaining his desire to get to the Romans. He's saying, "Part of the reason why I want to come to you so badly is that I have a debt. I have received something that I have to get out and share. This gospel is something that has been credited to me, and now I've got to get it out." Paul talks about himself this way in other places. He has an internal drive, a sense of compulsion to share this gospel, to evangelize others. In 1 Cor. 9:16 he speaks of it as a "necessity" laid on him. The way eating or drinking or breathing is for you and me, Paul breathed out, lived out, and bled an evangelistic spirit.

He says that he has this obligation towards what he calls "Greeks and barbarians." Greeks are the educated, elite upper crust people in society among the Romans. And barbarians are those at the bottom of the ladder, who were considered inferior and foolish. Paul says, "I'm obligated to both of them! I need to share the gospel with the fancy people and the uneducated people all across the spectrum."

And it's at this moment I would remind you, Christian: the gospel isn't just something that the nice, well-behaved, educated, middle-class and wealthy folks need to hear. It's also a message for the lower class and the poor. For those who haven't been to college, or high school, too. For those who are sharp and intellectually gifted, and for those with learning difficulties and challenges. There should be no barriers where we say, "Not them. Keep them out."

I have no doubt that there are some types of people that we personally fit in with better than others. There are some I am more comfortable talking to than others. But that's not an excuse. Notice that Paul feels the same equal obligation to all

people, from all classes, at all levels of education, even though Paul himself is HIGHLY educated. He's obligated to Greeks *and* Barbarians. The whole range of people.

It is this gospel that Paul says he's not ashamed of, and he tells us why. So we'll look at three aspects of what Paul is saying today. First, the Temptation to be Ashamed of the Gospel. Second, The God Whose Gospel Saves. And then third, The Gospel that Comes By Faith.

And make no mistake, Paul wants us to also have the same lack of shame about the gospel for ourselves, and he gives us the key to that attitude in this passage. So let's go there.

1. The Temptation to be Ashamed of the Gospel (1:15-16a)

First, Paul seems to acknowledge the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel.

We sometimes separate verses 15 and 16 from each other too much. We look at verses 14 and 15 and say, "So that's the intro. But body of Paul's letter *really* begins in verse 16: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel.' Now we're on to something else."

But I'd just encourage us to look for the connective glue throughout this letter as Paul moves along. The intro and what follows actually fit together *much* more naturally than that. Look at verse 15 again notice how it bleeds over into verse 16 here. Beginning in the second part of verse 15 Paul says,

"I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel."

So he says the reason he's eager to preach the gospel is because he has a lack of shame about the gospel. He is missing something that many Christians are tempted to feel. He has no shame. We're tempted to be ashamed of the gospel. Boy we don't want to admit that. We'd like to think that there may be some people who might go through that, but we'd never know that experience.

But the fact that Paul has to say that he's not ashamed shows that there are some who *are* ashamed, or might be. I think he is showing that even he has experienced

the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel. I mean, when Paul saw people lift stones to stone him, do you think it never crossed his mind that he might just say, “I’m kidding, I’m kidding!” Or to say, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’ll stop saying this stuff. Just please don’t attack me anymore!” Of course he experienced that temptation. He’s a human being; he’s a sinner still. It hurts to be attacked and hated by people. But Paul is implying here that shame slows us down, it makes us bashful. It stops us from fulfilling our callings. It makes us self-conscious, and slows down the cause of Christ. It’s an incredible temptation and an incredibly destructive temptation when we give in to it.

Paul is not ashamed, and he does not want any believer in Jesus Christ to be ashamed of the Gospel

Being ashamed of the gospel is a real and present temptation for us, though.

It’s not hard to picture how that might play out, we’ve all probably felt it at one time or another. You meet someone who is friendly and talkative, but they’re experiencing some kind of hardship, you know they would be blessed to know how they can be saved and have ultimate hope... but you talk yourself out of it.

You have someone in your life whom you love and care about, but you are afraid to invite them to church because you don’t want to seem weird.

There are some contexts in which it’s much harder than that – especially in hostile cultures. We know of missionaries like Joe and Kelly who were expelled from the country they were ministering in because they were, in fact, sharing the gospel. Maybe we hear these stories and we resolve that that won’t happen to us! We would keep our head down and stay out of trouble. That’s an approach that is very much ashamed of the gospel.

Now, we’re *not* in a hostile culture. We’re in a culture where evangelism is protected speech, and where usually the worst thing we fear is being disliked or to stick out. And so we talk ourselves out of sharing Jesus. There is no conflict with the other person, the whole conflict is usually in our own heads.

You see, the shame usually starts with us in our own hearts, and so we talk ourselves out of sharing Jesus, and the battle is lost before a shot has even been fired.

We may still want to find a way to be faithful, and so when we feel ashamed of the gospel, we may settle for a gospel of deeds, but not words. In other words, we resolve to be better people only, and we reduce the gospel to being good people and kind neighbors. We pull out the heart of the gospel and replace it with a performance of the gospel. We try to act out the gospel without sharing the gospel itself. That is another expression of being ashamed of the gospel.

There are at least two problems with this approach: one is that it tends to make people admire us, but without knowing what God has done in us, it just builds us up in other peoples' eyes. It makes them think, "what a good person!" But if we don't tell them about Jesus, we're just leading them to us. The problem is, we can't save this person. And so a gospel of only deeds is one way that we can be ashamed of the gospel, by masking Jesus himself even though he is their only hope.

The other problem of course is that Jesus and the disciples didn't do this. They combined mercy and help with a convicting lifestyle of ministering through word. They believed in the word of God and the power of God to change people through Christ himself.

Instead of seeing the evangelistic impulse as this sort of add-on to the Christian life that some Christians might have, but you maybe don't, I want you to learn from Paul today (because that's what I think he wants here!). What is Paul teaching us?

On the one hand Paul is exposing to the light the fact that we *can* be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel.

If you are weak in this area, then what an encouragement to hear someone like Paul say in essence, "I get it. I know what it's like to be bashful or timid, or to feel like maybe just keeping the good news to yourself. Somewhere inside we just want to hold onto it and not share it." There really is something helpful about having someone you respect admit to struggles. It not only humanizes them, but it helps us to see that their successes don't just come from having the perfect kind of personality for this sort of thing. Instead, it's something else. That's what Paul's doing on the one hand: he's exposing this temptation of being ashamed to the light.

But on the other hand, he's teaching us that when we understand the gospel, we will be able to fight this temptation!

The answer is not coaching yourself up, getting yourself excited, that sort of thing. If we keep following him here he's showing us that a right grasp of the gospel is what steals away any temptations to be ashamed of it. If you are ashamed of the gospel—Paul is saying—it means you still don't get it, or you haven't experienced it for yourself.

He's showing us here that just as he isn't ashamed of the gospel, we shouldn't be ashamed of the gospel, either. Once we see and savor this gospel, we will not be people who want to keep it to ourselves or hide it away never to be seen.

2. The God Whose Gospel Saves (1:16b)

Second, Paul takes us to the God whose Gospel saves.

Please remember that the gospel is not an abstract rule of the universe like math or gravity. The gospel is personal, and relates to a person whose name is God. What does Paul say in verse 16? First, he says he's not ashamed of the gospel, but then he says what it is:

“For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The gospel is the power of God; it is a personal reality. It's the power of someone. And that someone is *God*. It's *his* power. Think of whose power we're talking about. The power of God made the universe come into existence. The power of God created the mountains that we love so much. Mount Hood can be seen from incredible distances away, and it was created by the power of God. The highest peaks and deepest areas of the ocean – heights that would steal our breath, and depths that would crush our lungs... he made them all by his power.

And you can add the gospel to that list of amazing achievements, right alongside Everest and the Marianas trench. [In fact, the gospel is above and beyond those things]. The same God who made those things – Paul says it is *that* power which is seen in the gospel. And this is why he's not ashamed of it.

The power of the gospel is seen in the fact that it's not a mere net thrown out that might accomplish its purpose. In the Gospel, God does save sinners. It brings salvation; it doesn't just make salvation possible. He does rescue and redeem people from their sin. Paul will open that up in this letter later, but for now Paul is just giving us a taste of what's coming. The gospel saves sinners, and so because of that you can add it to the list of God's great and mighty works. It's the power of God.

How can someone be ashamed of the good news of a God who lifts sinners up from death to life? How can someone who has themselves received this salvation and been lifted up, themselves, possibly be ashamed of the message of the one who raised and saved him through it.

This goes back to the beginning idea here. Paul is explaining why he's not ashamed. He's explaining how you and I can do serious battle against our own timidity about sharing Jesus. He's explaining how you and I can battle and put down a thought to be ashamed of Christ whenever such thoughts rise up and threaten to overwhelm us. Christian, we of all people should never be ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God. Because it saves sinners. Because it saved us! Because if you are in Christ, that same gospel saved you.

Imagine someone who is drowning in the middle of the ocean, no help in sight. And imagine this person being saved by a boat. That boat would be the most beautiful thing they've ever seen. Can you imagine this person being embarrassed to go around and help drawing more people up out of the sea, onto the deck? No. They would be saying, "This boat saved my life. It's safe. There's room for everyone. These are my friends and neighbors who are still in the water. We have to get all of them. Every one. We have to pull everyone in. As many as will come."

Paul is not ashamed, because the gospel saves. Because the Gospel is the power of God. He's not ashamed of the gospel for the same reason no one is ashamed of the Grand Canyon: because it's glorious. He's not ashamed because there is nothing more amazing and wonderful in all the world than to hear those words: "You are righteous in Christ, not because of your own deeds, but because of the deeds of the risen savior imputed to us and received by faith alone."

Believer, do not be ashamed. This is your life and your health and where everything good in your life has come from. Do not be ashamed of this gospel.

But if you're not a believer, I want to speak to you as well: Jesus Christ saves sinners. We're not ashamed of that. Every member of this church has had to publicly profess that we are sinners. We're not ashamed that we needed to be saved by Jesus. I'm not ashamed of that. Paul's not ashamed of that. But you might be. You might not like religious talk very much, or you might even find the whole idea of the gospel offensive. You might even find it offensive to think that you might *need* anyone's help, let alone God's help in the gospel. Let me show you that you need this.

I used the example just a moment ago of the drowning person. [Now, elsewhere Paul says it's worse than that: we're actually dead in our sins and we need someone to raise us from death to life. We're spiritually dead unless God raises us up. But let's still go with the drowning analogy for a moment.] Many people do believe that they can doggy paddle forever. Some believe that they aren't even in the process of drowning. Some people forget the danger that they're in and don't see it. The next several sermons in this series will take us through Paul's argument to help us see that we're actually in great danger, but consider this: surely you see that there is something wrong with your heart, that you love the wrong things, and that you hurt other people. Most people struggle with feelings of guilt on a daily basis and don't know why entirely. But if we examine our own lives and hearts, what we find is that we know what we ought to do, and that we have indeed not done it.

Even if we don't go about doing obviously wicked things like robbing banks or randomly attacking people in the streets, we still neglect to do good things that we know we should do, and even if we try to do many good things, all of us still do things we shouldn't. We carry greed in our hearts. We hate other people deep down, and we try to resist those feelings perhaps, but they are there. All of these things show that something in us is wrong. There is a gap between the person we know we should be and the person that we are on a daily basis.

What the world often doesn't tell us is that we also have a sense of accountability – that we will answer to the maker one day for how we've lived. The Bible tells us there is coming a day of judgment. We shouldn't laugh at that. Deep down we yearn for it, whether we're believers or unbelievers. We do.

When someone who has killed dozens of people is put to death, there is still an emptiness in the world; his death hasn't fully atoned for what was done. We yearn for God to give people what they deserve, especially when we are badly hurt by them. We have a sense of God's judgment against others, and of a hope that he will make things right.

Well the truth is, he will. That instinctive sense that God will make right what has been wrong is correct. But unless we ourselves come to terms with our own sin, and are ourselves made right with God and address the sin that is in us, too, we will be dealt with according to our sins.

If we have ever stolen, that makes us a thief. If we have ever looked at a man or woman with lust in our heart, that makes us an adulterer. If we have ever even once cursed the name of God, that makes us a blasphemer. If we have ever loved something more than God, that makes us an idolater.

We're in God's world. We live with his law within us and around us. God's holy nature demands a response. Let me encourage you, especially if you are not yet a Christian, take God seriously, and take your sin seriously.

But what I'm not telling you to do is despair. Don't do that. Because the gospel is the power of God to *salvation*. But for salvation to make sense, you have to take seriously what it saves us from. And what it saves us from is our own sin and God's correct judgment, which we deserve.

In other words, you can be saved from your sin – what it does, and what it calls for. This is the good news of the gospel – that in Jesus Christ, you can be washed and cleansed and made free. How can you have that? Well Paul tells us in the next point.

3. The Gospel Comes By Faith (1:17b)

Because third Paul tells us that the gospel comes by faith.

How can you know the power of God unto salvation? How can you experience salvation for yourself? Paul's answer is in verse 17. He just said, this gospel is the power of God to everyone who believes. That word here is belief. Faith. Trust.

Then he begins the next sentence in verse 17 with the word "for," meaning that what follows explains what came before. How can the gospel be the power of God for you and me?

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

This deserves its own sermon, but let me just show you two things.

The first thing you should know is, it's not just the power of God, the gospel IS (Paul says) the righteousness of God. I would state it this way: the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. It shows us that God is righteous, but moreso it is God granting us his own righteousness.

There is an Italian reformed theologian named Peter Martyr Vermigli whose commentary on Romans I have been slowly but surely working on translating into English. And not long ago I read this from Vermigli about this exact passage:

"The righteousness of God here refers to goodness, clemency, and mercy—the manner in which God declares His favor toward us. God demonstrates this righteousness by freely bestowing it upon us."

Don't you love that? Peter Martyr is saying that the greatest and highest way that we see the righteousness of God is by receiving it ourselves. The best way we can know how sugar tastes is to actually put it in our mouth. And Peter Martyr goes on to argue that this is *why* the Bible so often uses righteousness and salvation interchangeably: because they are the same thing.

An example of this is Isaiah 51:5: "My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out...my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed." He's speaking of them interchangeably.

Or Isaiah 56:1: "Thus says the Lord: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed.'" Psalm

98:2, "The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations."

I think Peter Martyr is right. The righteousness of God being revealed is his salvation being revealed. He is good and righteous, and we see his righteousness most clearly in his saving of sinners.

I mentioned that sense of guilt and sin that all people have. But in the gospel, sinners go free. How is it that people who are guilty and sinful can go free without God being the sort of bad judge who just who just ignores evil doing altogether? If God saves sinners, how is he not caught up in their sin by just letting them go free?

The gospel is the answer to that question: it's a resounding no. In the gospel, sinners get saved and the goodness and holiness and righteousness of God is preserved and the integrity of his holiness is protected. This is what makes the gospel so glorious: no sin that is forgiven ever goes unpunished.

It's punished at the cross, Jesus Christ "was made sin even though he knew no sin so that in him sinners might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). We will talk about this idea that the gospel upholds God's righteousness more when we get to chapter 3 of Romans. But just know at this point that part of the glory of the Gospel is that in it God saves sinners and *never* compromises his holiness or winks at sin even one little bit. And we know that because of the cross. The cross shows us that God punishes sin fully and completely. If someone were to ever accuse God of taking sin lightly by letting sinners go free in Christ, all God would have to do is point to the horror of the cross and say, "That is how seriously I take sin." The cross protects and upholds the righteousness of God as he saves sinners. That's the first thing you should know.

The second thing you should know is how you *get* this righteousness. And it's hard to miss here in verse 17. Paul says, in the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

That last part is a quote from the book of Habakkuk; it's Paul's way of showing that this isn't a new doctrine that he just invented. This gospel is Paul's doctrine, just as much as it's an old testament doctrine that has always been true.

Literally the Greek here says God's righteousness is revealed "out of faith into faith." In other words, it is all of faith start to finish. The whole of salvation is of and by faith. It's faith all the way down.

How can you have this salvation? Paul does not say, "The righteous shall live by working harder than all the rest." He doesn't say, like Tom Hanks' character did at the end of *Saving Private Ryan*, "Earn this." Paul does not say, "Redeem yourself, wash yourself, live better, live cleaner..." If you think this is the gospel, then you've heard it all wrong.

Paul's answer is, you get it by faith. You get it by faith.

John Chrysostom, the fifth century preacher said it like this: "You do not receive God's righteousness by toils and labors, but you receive it by a gift from above contributing one thing only from yourself, namely, believing."

And even that faith is not a work, it's not a deed. It is a resting in and receiving of Jesus Christ and what he has done for sinners. It is not you doing something; in a sense it's actually you ceasing doing something, and looking to the one who can do something for you instead.

Faith is what you might call the instrument by which we take hold of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior, and rest in and receive him and his work. That's the scientific-sounding way of putting it. The theological way of putting it. It's how we become united to Jesus and receive all of his benefits including his righteousness and holiness.

But here's what it really means. It means that you actually rest now. You stop being proud of yourself for whatever things you've been able to do for yourself. You get this righteousness by resting, and stopping working and laboring and trying to wash yourself and cleanse yourself and deserve this amazing thing that God offers. You see, God knows that this gift is too great to ever deserve. He knows that by nature on our own, in our sin we are unrighteous. And yet he says that if you rest in Jesus Christ alone, then you are righteous. There is no mingling of good deeds here, it is pure faith. It is pure trust. It is purely looking to Jesus Christ.

That's it. You ask the question, "How can I be saved from my sin? How can I be saved from the guilt and consequence of my sin?" The answer is, you stop looking to yourself, and start look to the crucified and risen Jesus.

If you love that message, please know that the rest of this book will keep taking us deeper and deeper into the unfathomable love of God that we see. These verses today are only scratching the surface of that good news.

Conclusion

If you are ashamed of the gospel, first of all, confess that to the Lord. Take it to him, and ask him for heart change. But second of all, immerse yourself in the remedy that Paul takes us to today. Immerse yourself in this message of the good news. Let this book speak to you as we read it.

In the coming weeks we're going to see the darkness and blindness of the human heart. We'll see the seriousness of the human condition. Not just for ourselves, but of the people around us. We will dive head first into the drastic need we all have for the Savior.

He's not ashamed of the gospel, because it's the power of God to salvation! It is a display of power, not silliness. It's power, not weakness. It's power, not shame. It's an amazing thing, not an embarrassing thing. It's righteousness itself.

My prayer for you today, and as we go through this book of Romans is that like God did for Paul, that God would steal away our excuses, our fear, and any paranoia we might have about sharing the gospel.

Would you start praying if you haven't already that God would use this series to not only make you love the gospel of Jesus Christ, but that God would steal away from all of us the internal barriers that might prevent us from sharing Jesus Christ with a hurting, lost, and needy world?

Let's pray.