

Why Never to Be Ashamed of the Gospel – Part 2

Romans 1:16-17

We continue our verse by verse study of the epistle to the Romans. I would encourage you to take your Bibles this morning and turn to Romans chapter one. This is the second and final part of a series that I have entitled, “Why Never to Be Ashamed of the Gospel.”

I would like for you to go back with me in history almost 2000 years. Imagine being a new believer, having come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ at Pentecost in Jerusalem, having witnessed the miraculous working of God during that time. You are utterly transformed. You have become a new creature in Christ and then you return to Rome.

Most of those that did that were Jews. And some were Gentiles. But imagine now being in Rome—whether a Jew or a Gentile—and for a Jew now you abandon your system of works and, in turn, you family and probably most of your friends abandon you. And as a Gentile you abandon all of your idols. Friends and families forsake you. You begin to endure persecution. The ridicule and contempt is relentless. It is devastating and it keeps growing.

In fact, in the late second century one prominent hater of Christians named Celsus wrote this. Quote, “Let no cultured person draw near, none wise, none sensible for all that kind of thing we count evil. But if any man is ignorant, if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool, let him come boldly to Christianity.”

He went on to say, quote, “Of the Christians we see them in their own houses, wool dressers, cobblers and fullers, the most uneducated and vulgar persons,” end quote.

In fact, he compared them to a swarm of bats, to ants crawling out of their nests, to frogs holding a symposium around a swamp and to worms cowering in the muck.

This is the attitude of all your friends and family. Yet the gospel has changed you forever. You know that. Your life will never be the same. You long now for fellowship and you begin to search out others of like precious faith from slaves to noblemen, Jews and Gentiles the Word of God tells us, from vastly divergent backgrounds, different cultures, different religious traditions. You all come together. And what do you long to know? You long to know more about Christ. You long to know more about the salvation that is yours.

Imagine what it would have been like. But all you have, really, is the Old Testament Scriptures. Oh, different ones have some notes that they have taken, scribbled down on various things, memorized other things that they have heard from, perhaps, Jesus and the apostles. But you don't have the New Testament.

Dear friends, my point is this. It is hard for us to imagine how absolutely elated these saints would have been when the deaconess Phoebe brings this inspired letter to them from the apostle Paul. They would have been ecstatic. They would have all tried to make their own copies. They would have memorized it. They would have meditated upon

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it. It would have ultimately become a theme of every conversation. They would have made songs about it. Because they would say, “God in his mercy has not only saved us, but he has condescended to our lowly estate and revealed to us these glorious truths that we long to know more about.”

Would that we be so ecstatic about this inspired revelation?

And certainly as they came to this section before us today in verses 16 and 17 I can imagine that the tears would have begun to stream down their cheeks, tears of conviction as well as tears of joy when they heard these magnificent words in verse 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."¹

As they contemplated this passage the Holy Spirit reveals three exhilarating and amazing truths about the gospel, about their salvation and about ours because here they see three things: the power of God for salvation, the plan of God to receive salvation and the product of God in salvation.

Beloved, this is the glory of the gospel. And when you grasp these truths with all of your heart you will never be ashamed of the gospel. That is why Paul wrote this.

Now, by way of review we learned the last time that the gospel which is the message of the cross is the God ordained, God empowered, God revealed means by which he saves man and reconciles him to himself.

This is how God saves man from all that plagues him in this world, both collectively with respect to all of the miseries that we endure in this sin cursed earth as well as individually. By the power of God we are saved from three things. First of all from the penalty of sin because all that we do and all that we are is fundamentally offensive to God. We are saved, therefore, from his holy wrath having violated his law. Secondly, we are saved from the power of sin. Man is a slave to sin. He is a slave to Satan. We live under his dominion right now. He is the prince and the power of the air. We are unable to extricate ourselves from the tyranny of sin and of Satan. God has to do something. And in salvation it is his power that frees us from this bondage. And, thirdly, we are saved from the pollution of sin. Sin is a metastasizing corruption. Jesus likened it to the putrefying stench of death. Sin affects every aspect of creation including man's very nature. And, as a result, we encounter every imaginable form of evil, degradation, disease, misery, hopelessness and death.

Yet by the power of God in salvation we know that we will one day stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy.

¹ Romans 1:16-17.

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We also learned last time that man is totally unable to save himself. First of all by reason of depravity. All that man is, all that he does is fundamentally offensive to God. He is unable to save himself by reason of condemnation because when man enters into life he is already under the sentence of divine wrath because of the sin that he has committed in Adam. He is unable to save himself by reason of alienation because his mind is set in rebellion against God and also by reason of his corrupted will, because apart from God's convicting power in his life man's will is fully set in him to do evil.

Ultimately, his very essence is that of selfishness. His every choice is self centered, not God centered. And so if God doesn't do something, we will never be saved. And so Paul tells them the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

As we studied last week in Philippians 2:13, "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."²

And so we discover that salvation is accomplished, from beginning to end and in all of its parts, by God alone.

So that is the power of God for salvation.

But now, secondly, we see something else emerge from this text that would have brought great encouragement to their hearts and certainly does so to ours as well, because here we see the plan of God to receive salvation.

Notice in verse 16 that, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."³ And in verse 17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'⁴

You see, to believe is to have faith. This is the idea. It means to trust or to rely or to cast one's self upon someone or something for safe keeping, to depend upon that which deserves and warrants trust and dependence.

Now in the Old Testament and, frankly, in every age, the proper object of saving faith is the revealed Word of God. For example in Romans 4:3 we read, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."⁵

And in the New Testament the proper object of saving faith would include the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament Scriptures.

Now specifically saving faith may be characterized as the knowledge of and the assent to and undeserved reliance upon the finished work, the finished redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. This is the plan of God for how we would

² Philippians 2:13.

³ Romans 1:16.

⁴ Romans 1:17.

⁵ Romans 4:3.

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receive salvation, to believe, to have faith. This is the response that God demands of men.

Now, biblically, faith has three components to it. There is, first of all, an intellectual element to it. In other words, we have to have knowledge. You see, true saving faith is more than knowledge, but it always includes knowledge. That is, there must be truth which is the conscious object of faith. You know, faith does not just operate in some kind of a vacuum, in a void. God who cannot lie has spoken in his Word and based upon his testimony we place our faith, in other words, we believe in the gospel of Christ.

J I Packer said this and I quote. “Knowledge comes first. How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” He went on to say, “I want to be informed of a fact before I can possibly believe it. Faith cometh by hearing. We must first hear in order that we may know what is to be believed.”

Now, we must be careful. It is possible for a man to intellectually acknowledge the historical facts of the gospel and yet remain lost because he does not entrust the eternal safe keeping of his soul to the one who lies at the very heart of those historical facts.

In James two you will recall James is talking about faith without works. And he says in verse 19, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”⁶

And in Acts chapter eight and verse 13 we read of Simon the magician. It says that Simon believed, yet he was unrepentant.

And the Lord tells us himself in Matthew seven, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Now this leads us to a second and third element of faith beyond knowledge. There must be an emotional assent and there must be volitional trust, something that is an act of the will.

Now by emotional assent what I am saying here is there must be an emotional expression of agreement. We might say, for example, we have a gut reaction to something, that down deep within the core of who we are, what we have heard, what we believe resonates within our soul as being true. It also resonates within us that we are in desperate need of the truth of the gospel.

And so when the truth is apprehended intellectually, it must resonate within us.

You will recall the parable of the soils. In Matthew 13:23 we read of the good soil and we read that when he hears the word and understands it, he bears fruit. Why? Because it resonates within who he is.

⁶ James 2:19.

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But, again, not everyone does this. For example, in 2 Thessalonians two and verse 10 Paul speaks of those who “with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”⁷

I recall spending many hours with a man, a very wicked man who knew the gospel very well. He had grown up in the church. He knew the gospel as well as I did. And yet he would not submit to the truth. He preferred to live in rebellion to God.

He said—and this is a paraphrase, “I understand the gospel, but I just don’t buy it. Obviously it works for you, but it leaves me cold. I just don’t see that I am in need of being saved. I don’t see myself as being that bad. And what kind of a monster of a god would send people to an eternal hell just because they didn’t measure up to his standard?”

So here is a man that knew the truth, but he did not embrace it. There was no brokenness of heart over his sin. There as no emotional love therefore for the truth.

You see, those who do not plea for undeserved mercy will never receive it. It is very simple.

To years later he died in a tragic accident and I attended his funeral. It is so sad. As is so typically the case all of the family and pretty much everyone there said, “Oh, yeah, well, he is in a better place now. He is in a better place now because he made a profession of faith and he was baptized when he was a boy.”

And I thought, my, my how sad. I grieved not only for him because on the basis of the Word of God and his own testimony I knew where he went. I know where he is. I grieve over those who have been deceived by a distorted gospel, a gospel that distorts the truth of saving faith, that causes people to have a faith that will not save.

So faith must include knowledge. We must know the truth. There must be an emotional assent. In other words, we must fall in love with the truth, fall in love with the Savior so that we will surrender our sin and deny ourselves and follow Christ and embrace the truth.

But then, finally, there is a volitional element. There is trust, an act of the will. We must make the conscious decision to reject all of the lies that we have trusted in and depend only upon that truth.

A H Strong said this. Quote, “While faith is the act of the whole man and intellect, emotion and will are all involved in it, will is the all inclusive and most important of its elements. No other exercise of will is such a revelation of our being and so decisive of our destiny,” end quote.

⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

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Now, I want to make something very clear here as we move ahead in this study. Saving faith does not involve three separate acts, that of knowing and loving and trusting the truth. However, it does involve the whole of man, the whole of our being. Moreover, please understand that the act of faith is not what saves a man even when that faith is focused on the correct object. Rather, it is the object of faith that saves. It is God the Father who sent his Son and ministered the gospel through the Spirit who gives the gift of faith to the sinner. And the sinner then responds to that because of the power of God and it is ultimately God who responds to that faith and justifies the believer.

It is an amazing thing, is it not?

Dear Christian, this is the plan of God to receive salvation. And apart from the power of God and apart from his plan we would never be saved. Now I must also add that saving faith does not originate in some kind of sense experience. It originates from God.

People saw Jesus and the apostles perform incredible miracles and yet they did not believe. Remember in Luke 16 the rich man in hell cries out for father Abraham on behalf of his brothers. He says, "If someone goes to them from the dead they will repent."

Then he said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead."

You see, we walk by faith, not by sight, right?

In Matthew 16 verse 15 Jesus said to the disciples:

"But who do you say that I am?"

And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."⁸

So saving faith does not originate from some kind of a sense experience. Moreover, saving faith does not originate from some form of empirical evidence or some historical investigation.

I hear people often saying, "Oh, if we could just find Noah's ark on Mount Ararat. Boy, just think of the millions of people that would believe if we could find Noah's ark."

And it is interesting. There very well may be some satellite imagery that it is up there. We don't know. But we know biblically that while historical evidence may reinforce the credibility of the gospel, it cannot in and of itself produce saving faith. And it cannot

⁸ Matthew 16:15-17.

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ultimately be the basis of saving faith. Saving faith, moreover, does not originate in human reason. It is not because of our ability to think this thing through and figure it out. Faith does not rest on the sufficiency of the empirical evidence that we can see.

Just think of the overwhelming evidence that is mounting every day with respect to creation. Evolutionists run from creationists in debates today because they are systematically humiliated by the very evidence of science. And you would think that those people would believe, right? But they don't. They don't believe.

Isn't it interesting in 1 Corinthians one verse 21 Paul tells us, "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."⁹

What is the message preached? Christ crucified. That is the method that he uses, not, boy, look at all this evidence. Now you will believe.

In 1 Corinthians two and verse four Paul says, "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."¹⁰

Beloved, again, don't miss this. Saving faith is the free gift of God. Yes, it is the sinner who really believes, but ultimately his faith did not originate in him. It originated in God.

You see, God through the Holy Spirit convicts men of sin. He overwhelms man with the awfulness of the consequences of his sin. And then he drives him to freely and voluntarily fall upon the grace of God, to fall upon Christ for salvation.

By the way, that, in and of itself, refutes this ridiculous charge of fatalism. It is God that drives man to freely and voluntarily fall upon Christ for salvation.

Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."¹¹

2 Peter 1:3. "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness."¹²

His divine power. My, what an incredibly humbling doctrine. How much more the tears of humility and joy must have streamed down the cheeks of those who contemplated these truths there in Rome.

I wish I could have been there. Eternal life is both acquired and lived by faith in Christ alone.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:21.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

¹¹ Philippians 1:29.

¹² 2 Peter 1:3.

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“For by grace you have been saved through faith.”¹³

This is God’s plan for salvation, but notice he adds in verse 16, “to everyone who believes.”¹⁴

In other words, regardless of race, regardless of ethnicity, “to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”¹⁵

To the Jew first. What is that referring to?

Well, you will recall that when Jesus met with the Samaritan woman he said in John 4:22 that, “Salvation is from the Jews.”¹⁶

You see, they were the original chosen people through whom he ordained the Savior to come. They were the original custodians of divine truth. That truth has now been temporarily transferred to the Gentile church.

You see, they were the original—and still are, frankly—the royal family of the human race. They were the recipients of the eternal covenants of which other nations were strangers. And when the Messiah arrived, when Jesus first came he came first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

You see, originally he first preached to them alone. In fact, in Matthew 10 Jesus instructed the 12 to avoid the Gentiles and the Samaritans. He said, “But rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Later Paul reminded the Romans, “Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,”¹⁷ Romans 15:8.

Now, of course, Paul was appointed as an apostle to the Gentiles and he went on to remind them that God in his mercy and in his grace decided to minister to the people outside of the covenant.

In verse nine of Romans 15 he says, “And for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,”¹⁸ and then he quotes from the Old Testament prophets, “THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME.”¹⁹

My, as a Gentile, I rejoice in that, don’t you? All of you Gentiles?

¹³ Ephesians 2:8.

¹⁴ Romans 1:16.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John 4:22.

¹⁷ Romans 15:8.

¹⁸ Romans 15:9.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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He goes on to say:

REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE... PRAISE THE LORD
ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM...
THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO
ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE
GENTILES HOPE.²⁰

So, indeed, salvation is available to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, but also to the Greek.

Beloved, we are all trophies of his grace.

Now, on what basis do we have to be ashamed of the gospel?

So Paul establishes the power of God for salvation and, secondly, the plan of God to receive salvation. But then notice the product of God in salvation in verse 17.

He says, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.”²¹

The idea here is from faith to faith to faith to faith to faith. You see, this emphasizes not only the magnificent lengths of faith in the long chain of the redeemed who have lived by faith, but also the permanence of our faith whereby a person of genuine saving faith will persevere in the righteousness that he has received by the power of God.

You see, his righteousness was revealed to your faith, to my faith and to your faith, to your faith, to your faith and on and on it goes. That is his point. And it will never be rescinded. We can never lose it. Once again, salvation is all of grace. It is not of works.

You see, we can do no more to lose our salvation than we did to gain it. And when you understand these truths it utterly undermines these notions that somehow a person can lose his salvation.

Now what is the righteousness of God? Beloved, this is the key concept of the entire epistle. And we are going to look at it briefly here this morning. He uses the term 35 times in this letter. And, again, this is the product of God in salvation, the righteousness of God. This is what is activated by faith.

You see, this is a righteousness that comes from God and one that satisfies his holy justice for all who have violated his law.

You see, man has a profound problem and that is how in the world can we possibly be made right with a holy God? How are we going to do that given our sinfulness, given our sin nature?

²⁰ Romans 15:10-12.

²¹ Romans 1:17.

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Job said in chapter nine verse two, “But how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to dispute with Him, He could not answer Him once in a thousand times.”²²

And in chapter 25 verse four Job says, “How then can a man be just with God?”²³

In Psalm 143 verse two David says, “For in Thy sight no man living is righteous.”²⁴

You see, you have got to see a courtroom here to really understand this. God is the judge. We are the defendant. God’s standard is perfect righteousness because he is perfectly righteous.

Now, there are only two possible ways that we can meet God’s demand, the demands for his law. One is we have got to keep the law perfectly in all of its parts our whole life. Or, secondly, we have to pay the penalty for breaking that law and, thus, offending the law giver.

Now, the former no man save Jesus of Nazareth has ever done or ever could do. And the latter in terms of paying the penalty, beloved, man could never do that if he suffered an eternity in hell. Therefore, Christ on the cross had to become the infinite sacrifice. He was the one who was wholly pure, perfectly righteous. And to think that he voluntarily satisfied all of the demands of the broken law and therefore he fully propitiated or satisfied or appeased the offended holiness of God. He did it for us.

You see, at salvation the sinner then appropriates that payment for himself by faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the sinner is justified by the death of Christ. You see, that is the basis of his justification. And by faith we appropriate that justification.

So what Paul is saying here in verse 17 is that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith referring to the righteousness of Christ, based upon his substitutionary atonement on the cross, imputed to the sinner by sovereign grace.

And how does this become the sinner’s own possession? By means of God given faith.

You see, this is the great doctrine of justification, that judicial act of God by which he declares the sinner righteous and treats him as such.

Now, it is important for you to understand that justification is not some kind of legal fiction as we sometimes call it. You see, God does not declare righteous those who are really guilty and wicked. Rather, justification is based upon our union with Christ. You see, God declares the believer wholly righteous because he sees that believer in his Son. He sees us in Christ and, thus, that believer is, in fact, righteous in the sight of the all

²² Job 9:2-3.

²³ Job 25:4.

²⁴ Psalm 143:2.

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holy, the all knowing, the all righteous sovereign of the universe, because we are united in Christ.

Beloved, this is the glory of our salvation. Think about it. We have been united with Christ. We have his righteousness now.

Now don't think with the Savior—as sometimes people do—as the Lord merely at the right hand of the Father and he somehow is distant from us. Even though that is true, he is there, we must also remember that he is the one who dwells within us. Remember as we studied last week, God redeems that he might inhabit.

In John 17 in the Lord's high priestly prayer in verse 22 Jesus said:

And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.²⁵

And Paul said in Ephesians one and verse six, you will recall there he rejoices in, quote, “the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”²⁶

Chapter two verse 10 of Ephesians, “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.”²⁷

In Colossians two verse six he says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith.”²⁸

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature.”²⁹

Again, 2 Peter 1:4, we are partakers of the divine nature.

Beloved, the point is we have an intimate union, a oneness with Christ. And it is for this reason that he is our greatest delight. He is in us. We are in him. You see, our union with Christ is the basis of all of the blessings that we have in salvation. And because of this God does not see our sin, but he sees the righteousness of Christ.

In the New Testament we read that we have been crucified with Christ. We are dead with Christ, buried with him, raised up together in Christ, seated together in heavenly places in Christ. We are hid with Christ in God. The Scriptures goes on to teach us that because of our union with Christ we have no condemnation because we are in Christ. In Christ we are free from the law. We possess the righteousness of God in him.

²⁵ John 17:22-23.

²⁶ Ephesians 1:6.

²⁷ Ephesians 2:10.

²⁸ Colossians 2:6-7.

²⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

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Other passages speak of how we are in Christ and therefore we have wisdom, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. We are complete in him. We are dead in Christ. We who are dead in Christ shall rise.

In Galatians 3:28 we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Beloved, all of these astounding realities are implied in Paul's statement here with respect to the product of our salvation.

Verse 17. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"³⁰

Dr. Merrill Unger said this and I quote. "In this marvelous operation of God, the infinitely holy judge judicially declares righteous the one who believes in Jesus. A justified believer emerges from God's great courtroom with the consciousness that another, his substitute has borne his built and that he stands without accusation before the bar of God." Romans 8:1.

He goes on to say, "Justification makes no one righteous, neither is it the bestowment of righteousness as such, but rather declares one to be justified whom God sees as perfected once and forever in his beloved Son."

And therefore he concludes by making this statement. "The correct formula of justification is this. The sinner becomes righteous in God's sight when he is in Christ. He is justified by God freely all without a cause because thereby he is righteous in his sight," end quote.

What staggering truths. And how those early saints must have exploded once again in tears and maybe even in applause as they understood the righteousness of God was imputed to them simply because of their union with him, because of his righteousness, not because of their personal righteousness.

For this reason would later declare in Romans 4:4, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due."³¹

And in verse five he says, " But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as..."³² What? As righteousness.

Is it any wonder when by divine enlightenment Martin Luther understood this text in Romans 1:17 and he declared it to be the happiest day of his life.

³⁰ Romans 1:17.

³¹ Romans 4:4.

³² Romans 4:5.

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He wrote this and I quote, “The sum and substance of this letter is to pull down, to pluck up and to destroy all wisdom and righteousness of the flesh and to affirm and enlarge, that is prove to be large the reality of sin however unconscious we may be of its existence.” He went on to say, “For God does not want to save us by our own, but by an extraneous righteousness, one that does not originate in ourselves, but comes to us from beyond ourselves which does not arise on earth, but comes down from heaven,” end quote.

He got it. He got it. And I hope you get it. Because, dear friends, if you get it, it is going to change not only your understanding of salvation theologically. It is going to change how you live. I mean, let this sink in. We are saved by grace through faith. And the righteous live by faith.

Practically speaking, I don't have to be preoccupied with legalistic religious rules and rituals, with taboos, with regulations. I don't have to worry about things like what my culture says we need to do with respect to church attendance or how much money we need to give or what style of clothing I need to wear or the style of music I am supposed to listen to or worship with. I don't have to worry about what I have to eat, what I have to drink, any of those types of things.

It is so sad and it is so divisive to see a man whose conscience binds him to some non moral, non essential things that prevents him from enjoying his full liberty in Christ. Just think how ridiculous it is to be obsessed with those types of things and how that fuels our pride, our self righteous pride. It is, in essence, saying that we are convinced that there is something more that is needed than the righteousness of Christ.

Yes, I have the righteousness of Christ, but in order to really be acceptable to God I have got to be this way or be that way or look this way or wear that and on and on it goes.

What an insult to the righteousness of Christ. That is why Legalism is so absolutely horrid and that is why I will not allow it in this church and I hope you won't either. And it is so easy for us to let it sink in, to let it slip in in the way we conduct ourselves. The righteous man will live by faith, not by works. It is not like yes I have got the righteousness of Christ but now I must add these things in order for me to be more acceptable to him.

What a horrid thing.

My, what a comfort Paul's words must have been to those beleaguered persecuted saints. Think about it. The Jews were in bondage to the law. Now they could relax and could say, “Oh, thank you, God,” that because of the righteousness of Christ I am free from that bondage.

And the Gentiles are now freed from the bondage of their own lusts and their idols. Thank you, Lord, that now as a righteous man I can walk by faith. What encouragement this must have been to them.

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In the ruins of ancient Rome archaeologists excavated a very revealing painting that really captures the prevailing attitudes of those that were in that culture. The picture is carved on a plaster and it depicts a donkey that is hanging from a cross with a slave bowing down before it. And under it is an inscription that reads, “Exleximinus worships his God.”

You know, with all that was going on it would have been so easy for them to be ashamed of the gospel. I struggle with it at times, don't you? When you have an opportunity to share Christ don't you feel that fear going up within you and you want to kind of change the way you say things so it won't be quite as offensive.

Or we come along and we add something to the gospel to think that somehow we are more acceptable to God or we become cavalier in how we articulate the gospel. And that is why to the best of my ability I try to be so careful in choosing just the right words to describe what God has given us in his Word so that we won't in any way distort it. It is so easy to do.

We must be so careful of how we choose our words.

And I close with this example.

As I was thinking about these things and how it applies to my own life and why it is so, so important for us to never be ashamed of the gospel because of all of its riches, I was reminded of many of the saints that have gone on before us who have died because of the gospel, because one carefully chosen word can transform the gospel of grace into a damning lie, just one word, just a couple of words, just a little thought, just a little twist.

And isn't that how Satan always works? You take the truth and, oh, my, boy, does this ever look good. But you twist it just a little bit and it is a lie.

As I often say, it is like venom from a poisonous snake. Over 90 percent of it is protein. But it is that 10 percent that will kill you.

Millions of saints just like us have died for the purity of the gospel they were not ashamed. And I thought about something that I was recently reminded of. And that is how the enemy hates the purity of the gospel.

Back in the mid 1500s there were about 300 pastors, elders and key lay people who objected to the wording pertaining to the efficacy of the Catholic mass during the reign of Queen Mary. The Catholics and the Queen insisted that the real presence of Christ was somehow in the elements of the Lord's table. You are familiar with that doctrine of transubstantiation and so forth.

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But the reformers insisted, no, no, no. That is not true. The atoning work was sufficient. When Christ was on the cross he said, “It is finished.”³³ We don’t have to come along and start adding more to it here. We don’t have to keep re-crucifying Christ and on and on and on.

Well, the heretics would not stand for it. Queen Mary would not stand for it so she ordered all of these men to be captured and they were what is called hanged, drawn and quartered.

Beloved, it is a punishment that is so demonic, that is so barbaric, I will not even speak of it. But, dear friends, my point is this. Our blood may one day be required for the sake of the gospel. But may I leave you with a certain truth? Because we have been united with Christ and therefore we possess the righteousness of God in him, our faith will remain. His grace will be sufficient. And ultimately we will not be ashamed of the gospel because, indeed, it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

Let’s pray together.

Father, these eternal truths are overwhelming to us. You have given us a mind and the ability to understand language. And because we are made in your image we can grasp that which you would have us grasp. But, oh Lord, would that by the power of your Spirit we live out these truths. It is not enough for us to just be able to articulate them. But, Lord, we want to live them for your glory. We thank you and we praise you for the gospel, for this alien righteousness that is not ours, but yours. And, Lord, I pray for anyone who does not know you as Savior. Lord, would you convict them this day of their sin. Lord, protect our church from ourselves. May we be living examples of the gospel of grace to the praise of your glory. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell’s messages, please visit OliveTreeResources.org.

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³³ John 19:30.

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