

## Romans – session #4

We left off last time with chapter 1, verse 16. One of Paul's most famous verses in all of his 12 Epistles. (Read 1:16-23).

Vs. 16 – “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”.

Vs. 17 – “for in it, the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, he who through faith us righteous, shall live.”

These two verses are a complete summary of everything that follows in the letter to the Romans. If you want a Cliffs Notes version of Romans, these two verses are it. They summarize beautifully and eloquently, Paul's theological position on the meaning of Jesus death and resurrection and of God's action to save us all. They are truly a summary of the Christian faith in a nutshell.

The theme of Romans is God, and what God has done for us, what God's act of sending His Son to die on the cross has accomplished for us.

Paul indeed was “not ashamed of the Gospel.” By the time he writes Romans, he had:

1. Already been imprisoned in Philippi – Acts 16:16-18 (for healing a young girl with a spirit of divination that her masters were using for making a profit. Paul healed her and in effect took away her as a source of income. So he was put in prison there.
2. Been chased out of Thesalonica – Acts 17: 1- 10 – where Paul and Silas were accused of “turning the world upside down” by their proclamation of Jesus Christ.
3. Been smuggled out of Beroea – Acts 17: 11-14 – because wherever Paul went the local community of Jews were in an uproar because of their teaching that Jesus was God, and because they feared the Roman authorities would come after them.
4. Laughed at in Athens by the intellectuals and those who had myriad Gods – Acts 17: 16-32
5. Preached in Corinth where his message had been declared to be “foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews” I Corinthians 1:22-23.

Paul often said he “gloried” in the Gospel and in the cross of Christ. Romans 5:2, Romans 5:11, II Corinthians 10:17, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:7. No, Paul was never ashamed of the Gospel.

1:16 – Paul says – “the Gospel is the power of God for Salvation”. Amen to that! As Leon Morris notes in his commentary on Romans, which is my guide for this study, “The Gospel is not advice to people, suggesting that they lift themselves up. The Gospel is power. It lifts them up”. Great quote is it not?

Salvation has only one restriction, to receive it “you must have faith”, you must believe. Sorry to all of our modern world which claims that you can be saved just because God loves you. Yes, He loves you. But he has provided one way to receive eternal life and that way is through His Son's death on the cross and resurrection and our placing our trust in that act of love, which then declares us to be righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.

The universality of the Gospel is put this way by Paul in his letter to the Galatians 3:28 - “For there is neither Jew, nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, **for you are all one in Jesus Christ.**”

Vs. 17 – Paul explains his theology. “the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel”. Scholars say it is not clear whether the word righteousness here is being used to describe God, or whether it is being used to describe the new status of the believer, or both.

But the righteousness of God “is revealed”. It is not something we know naturally, it must be revealed to us. By the power of the Gospel.

Vs. 17 – the last phrase as it is written – “He who through faith is righteous shall live” is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4.

C.H. Dodd says this about faith – “For Paul faith is that attitude in which acknowledging our complete insufficiency for any of the high ends of life, we rely utterly on the sufficiency of God. It is to cease from all assertions of the self, even by way of effort after righteousness, and to make room for divine initiative”.

For Paul, a person is only righteous by faith. Not by personal achievement, no matter how good of a person they are. The blessed state of righteousness is not earned, and it is not a reward for being good. Romans 3:20, 3:22, 3:24, 3:28, 4:2-3, 4:13, 5:1, all hammer the point, righteousness is a gift of grace, not something we can attain by our own efforts. We are justified by faith alone.

Chapter 1:18- 5:21 is sometimes referred to as the “way of deliverance”. It begins with a section on our universal sinfulness (1:18-3:20). My RSV bible breaks it down like this:

1:18-32 – God’s judgement upon sin

2:1-11 – Jews are under judgement as well as the pagans

2:12-16 – The rule of judgement

3:1-8 – the advantage of the Jews as the people of the covenant

3:9-20 – all are guilty

I would like to say something at this point of our study of Romans that I think is important. As we move forward Paul is going to speak harshly about sin. But I always try to remember what Paul says in Romans 3:23 –“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Sometimes we tend to think of others as sinners who are worse than we are. Paul reminds us that none of us escape from God’s condemnation, we are all guilty in His eyes, because He is holy. We are all seen by God in accordance with what I pointed out in my sermon this morning based on the antithesis section of the sermon on the mount. It is not just our actions and deeds that God sees as sinful, it is our inner attitude. We are all guilty, even in our actions are not a manifestation of our sinfulness.

I learned a long time ago not to be too quick to judge another person, or as Jesus put it: “let he who is without sin cast the first stone”. The woman who was caught in an adulterous relationship, by Jewish law was to be stoned to death. Jesus was a devout Jew. But no more are we to destroy people over their shortcomings. God then asks her to repent, which literally means to go in a different direction and path in her life. God wants us all to be healed from the inner and outward failings of our lives.

Our sinfulness, mine and yours will manifest themselves in different ways, but in God’s eyes he does not allow the different ways our sin manifests itself to set us up in different camps. He has no “basket of deplorables” to categorize and put His beloved children in no matter how far we fall. He loves us all, all life is sacred. He loves us even though He knows us all intimately. His desire is that we all find the grace and strength to experience His love more deeply. His desire is for us to be free from the bondage of those things that hold us captive and prevent us from His joy, peace and love.