

Sunday, May 1, 2022 | Church Words

Romans 1:1-17 | “Gospel”

Today, we start a new series called "Church Words." Oftentimes, people who have been in church awhile use language that is unfamiliar to new believers and unbelievers (i.e., "gospel," "justification," "propitiation," etc.). And sometimes, even the Christians who use those words don't fully comprehend their significance. In this series, we will use the book of Romans to help us better understand some commonly used "church words" and their application to believers.

Paul's letter to the Romans is a remarkable book. And, like all good discussions, Paul begins by giving his readers a thesis, which is to say, the whole point he will be trying to make. And for the book of Romans, Paul's proposition is found in the last two verses of his introduction: 16-17.¹ It will then take him 16 chapters, 433 verses, and 7,114 words to explain what he meant in those two verses alone.² Meaning that what I intend to achieve today is no small feat as I would like to explain what we mean we use the term “gospel.”

But, before we begin, I want to impress on you how remarkable the book of Romans itself is. According to Rom. 16:22, Paul dictated this letter to a scribe named Tertius and scholars believe it would've taken him over eleven hours, at least, to get through the whole thing from start to finish.³ And considering how clearly the book is broken up into differing topics that seamlessly flow from one to another, it would be no surprise to learn that this one letter took weeks to compose. Setting aside the time variable, the book of Romans itself would've required a substantial sum of money to produce. Even if we assume that Paul's scribe donated his time, given what we know about the price of paper (papyrus) at this time, it would've likely cost Paul over 20.68 denarii just for the materials alone.⁴ Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard in Matthew 20 seems to indicate that 1 denarius was the wage for a day's work. Thus, just to earn enough money for the materials for the book of Romans, a person would've had to work for nearly three weeks!

Why am I bringing this up? Because while it is often said that the Bible is inspired by God, and this is true, the books contained within the pages of Scripture are also the products of gifted

¹ Morris, Leon, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, England; Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), p. 66.

² Keener, Craig, “Paul's crafting of the book of Romans—the \$2275 letter!” December 19, 2011, *Bible Background, Research and Commentary from Dr. Craig Keener*, <https://craigkeener.com/pauls-crafting-of-the-book-of-romans-the-2275-letter/>, [accessed, April 29, 2022].

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

human writers. Written works like *Romans* are not the haphazard ramblings of madmen; instead, these writings are carefully thought out/through arguments intended to garner faith in anyone who reads them.

We're about to read words were penned sometime during Paul's third missionary journey, around A.D. 57 (cf. Act. 20:2-3), a couple of decades after Christ's resurrection. It was written to a group of believers, likely a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish converts, who had already brought the Gospel to Rome. In fact, their faith was already widely heard about (Rom. 1:8). Thus, Paul did not plant the church here, but he was interested in helping them grow in their faith.

Paul was in Corinth, a town just outside Athens, Greece, when he wrote this epistle to Rome. If you were to travel that same distance today, without crossing the Adriatic Sea, the trip would take you over 25 hours by car, and you'd have to travel over 1,500 miles. A woman by the name of Phoebe was the one who first carried the letter to Rome (Rom. 16:1-2), and then, from there, it spread throughout the four corners of the world. Today, it's traveled from Rome to Baltimore, some 4,448 miles, through time, some 1,965 years, just to be read by you this morning.

And what's the point that Romans is trying to make? Well, let's find out.

READ: Romans 1:1-17 (ESV)

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I do not

want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Paul wants us to know **four** things about the Gospel.

i. The Gospel is not a thing to be ashamed of.

To be ashamed of the Gospel means that one refused to proclaim/share the Gospel for fear of reprisals.

Paul had suffered dearly for proclaiming the good news. For instance, in 2 Cor. 11:23-28, he lists the many hardships he's endured: imprisonments and beatings, which often brought him to the brink of death. He had been whipped 5 times with 39 lashings each, beaten with rods three times, and stoned at least once. During his journeys, he had been shipwrecked three times, cast adrift at sea for a night and day, and been in danger from rivers, robbers, Jews, Gentiles, cities, the wilderness, the sea, and even false Christians! He describes his work as being a hardship that was done despite many sleepless nights and often going without food and drink, as well as being exposed to the cold. And then, on top of all that, he said he carried with him the pressures of the churches, which tended to make him worrisome and anxious. So, for Paul to say that he was not ashamed of the Gospel was, quite frankly, an understatement. To be a bearer of God's good news was a mark of distinction for Paul.

Too many Christians today need to be reminded that their faith is not a thing to be ashamed of (cf. Mar. 8:38; Lu. 9:26; 2 Tim. 1:8, 11-12). It is a thing to be proud of. To be called a Christian, even mockingly, is a good thing. The world would have us be ridiculed into silence. But, hear me, please do not allow your voice to be silenced by bullies. Rome was a hotbed of political turmoil, pop culture, and various religions all mingled together. It was a pluralistic society where truth was in the eye of the beholder.

Many have bemoaned the spiritual state of America today, and rightly so. But, when compared to Rome in the first century, the US is a bastion of tolerance and spiritual revival. Today we can worship publicly without fear of persecution. But less than a decade after Paul wrote Romans,

Nero took Christians and set them on fire to light his gardens. And yet, in spite of the opposition, in just a few short centuries, the Roman Empire would be turned upside-down by the Gospel. Why? Because Christians, like Paul, were not ashamed of the Gospel.

America and the world are not as hopeless as we might think if Christians would, like Paul, be proud of their spiritual heritage rather than being ashamed of it.

ii. The Gospel is the power of God.

Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because it was so powerful that it alone could save people. Do you know how much power it would take to translate one person from an earthly state to a heavenly one? How could we even begin to quantify it? We can't, apart from Jesus Christ. It took Jesus' blood to redeem not just one person but all those who believe.

The Greek word Paul uses for "power" is the term **δύναμις** (du-na-mis). This is the same Greek term used to get our English word dynamite. Like the sparkplug of an engine, the gospel explodes in the heart of a believer, roaring them into new life. Practically speaking, Jesus himself was imbued with such power that just a touch would heal (cf. Lu. 6:19; 8:46). But this is not the sort of power given to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Rather than miracle-working power, it is a saving power that redeems what would have otherwise been unredeemable (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:42-45; 2 Cor. 12:9). And of the two "powers," the latter is far greater than the former (cf. Mat. 9:1-8).

iii. The Gospel is for everyone.

Before Jesus Christ, being a follower of God, one would have to either become a Jew through circumcision or you would have to be born a Jew. Today, becoming a follower of God occurs when one puts your faith in Jesus Christ to save you. You no longer have to be born into the right family nor convert to some ethnic way of life; you must simply believe. This is a point that Paul will make over and over again throughout the book of Romans (cf. 2:5-11; 3:9, 22-23, 29-30; 4:9-12, 16-17; 9:24; 10:11-13; 11:32; 15:8-12).⁵ For practical reasons, Paul needed to make this point because most of the Christians at this time were Jewish converts. Should the Roman church adopt his message, they will be strategically placed to help him reach the non-Jewish world. If the Gospel could make it there, it could make it anywhere. Furthermore, after all, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Gal. 1:11-12). Paul does not negate that the Jews should be of priority, but they are not to be the sum total of the Gospel's focus. This is why

⁵ Schreiner, Thomas R., *Romans*, Second Edition, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2018), p. 66.

Paul would often make it his habit of going to synagogues first when he entered a new city, but then would move into the rest of the area.

Now, today, we have little trouble swallowing the truth that the Gospel is as much for the non-Jew as it is for the Jew. This was something a Jew had difficulty wrapping their minds around, and it took more than a little convincing (cf. Ac. 10:9-16). But this is not to say we do not put up barriers between the proverbial "us" and "them." The Gospel is for everyone you come in contact with, from your stubborn family member to the foreigner who may not speak English and even to your political rival. We do not pick and choose who should hear the good news. The good news is for everyone.

iv. The Gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness.

Another reason why Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel was because it revealed God's righteous character in the hearts of believers. As Phillips explains, "righteousness is that which God is, has, and gives."⁶ And, through the Gospel, the Lord reveals it in us! Like some buried treasure, that we should find such a gift as this in us should make us surprised, astounded, and grateful. God's righteousness—holiness, perfection, and rightness—was imputed; that is to say, it was transferred to us. God's righteousness through faith in Jesus is a declarative sort of righteousness. We, whose righteousness was like filthy rags, are declared righteous. The Judge declares we are not guilty even though we are still guilty (cf. Rom. 10:1-5; Phil. 3:2-9).

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In the same way that God made Christ to be in, though he was certainly not a sinner, God made us righteous, though we were undoubtedly unrighteous. It is a paradox of the Christian life to realize that the closer you grow in your relationship with God, the more you realize how genuinely sinful you are, which, in turn, makes you all the more grateful that your salvation is not based on you at all but on what Christ has done for you. The Gospel is like a roadmap leading to a great treasure: the righteousness of God.

Practically speaking, once a person believes, Jesus takes up residence in a person's mind and reveals what things need to change. Thus, believing in the Gospel and getting saved makes a person sensitive to God's morals. Through faith, a person finally comes to know the difference

⁶ Phillips, John, *Exploring Romans*, The John Phillips Commentary Series, (Grand Rapids; Kregel Publications, 1969), p. 20.

between right and wrong. I appreciate modern medicine, psychology, and philosophy, but, by themselves, they are poor substitutes to address our fallen human condition. Only the Gospel can do this (cf. Eph. 4:20-24). Meaning that, while our salvation is secure in Jesus, living out our faith is not a one-time decision but a daily walking in accordance with God's word. The Gospel teaches us how to live out God's righteousness.

So, what's the takeaway?

The Gospel is not only good news that can save you; it is also good news that will keep you.

The Gospel is good news to the sinner because it tells them that they can be saved despite what they've done. But it is also good news to the saint because it tells them that they are still saved regardless of what's occurring around them.

READ: Romans 1:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Eternal life was secured through faith, and it is through faith that eternal life will be realized. It is a poor Christian life that only looks to faith one time in order to be saved. This is why Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 when he says the "just will live by faith." Those words were not the words of the prophet but the words of the Lord to the prophet. They were instructions on how the righteous—those who follow God—were to live despite the difficulties and the "apparent contradiction between God's promises and what takes place in history."⁷ God wants the faithful to live by faith from start to finish. They will not live through works, knowledge, or human achievement but in believing in God. That is not only the way to get saved; it is also the only way to live this life in total unswerving devotion to Jesus Christ. This is what it means when we live out the Gospel in our day-to-day lives that despite what the circumstances may be, you continue to believe in God and follow His leading.

So, what's the takeaway?

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Moo, Douglas, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), p. 77.

Video Description

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TEXT: Romans 1:1-17

The Gospel is good news to the sinner because it tells them that they can be saved despite what they've done. But it is also good news to the saint because it tells them that they are still saved regardless of what's occurring around them. Eternal life was secured through faith, and only through faith will eternal life be realized.

It is a poor Christian life that only looks to faith one time in order to be saved. This is why Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 when he says the "just will live by faith." Those words were not the words ***of the prophet*** but the words ***of the Lord to the prophet***. They were instructions on how the righteous—that is, those who follow God—were to live despite life's difficulties. God wants the faithful to live by faith from start to finish. The Christian will not live through works, knowledge, or human achievement but in believing in God. This is what it means when we live out the Gospel daily. Thus, the Gospel is not only good news that can **save** you; it is also good news that will **keep** you.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: