

The Book of Romans
The Keynote of Romans, Part 2
Romans 1:16-17
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As we anticipate Reformation Sunday just a couple of weeks away, there really is no more appropriate text for us to turn to than the one before us this morning, and that is Romans 1:16-17. It was this text that forever altered the life of a young monk named Martin Luther. And these two verses, through him, sparked a spiritual revolution.

Now when Martin Luther began university, it was in the field that his father wanted him to pursue, and that was law. Luther excelled as a student. He gave great promise of becoming successful in his field. But at the same time that he was succeeding and excelling in his studies, he was deeply troubled in his soul. From boyhood, Luther was deeply troubled by the thought that one day he would die and he, a guilty sinner, would stand before God his Creator. There were events in his life that only added to that consternation and trouble. One of those happened during his college days. Two of his closest friends died, and that only accentuated the fact that he too, one day, would die and stand before God his maker. But really, the life changing experience for Martin Luther came in the summer of 1505. Luther was caught in a violent thunder storm. He was almost struck by lightning, and the bolt was so close to him that it actually knocked him off of his horse. And as he had been trained as a Catholic to do in that moment of terror, he cried out to his patron saint, Saint Anne. And he said, "Saint Anne, if you will save me from death, then I'll become a monk." A couple of months later, in August of that summer, to his father's dismay, he entered the monastery of Augustinian hermits and became a monk.

Luther was, in fact, as he had been as a university student, also as a monk, exemplary. He fasted and prayed constantly. He devoted himself to the menial task to which he was assigned. But above everything else, Luther spent hours and hours in confession each day. This became a great frustration both to his superiors and to his fellow monks. I mean after all, how much can trouble can you really get into in a monastery? Well, as you know, a great deal. But he was trying desperately to deal with the guilt of his sin, and this is how he'd been taught to do so. And so he would, for example, spend hours confessing his secret craving for his fellow monk's food. Finally, his superiors ordered him to stop until he had something worthy of confessing. What marked these days for Luther was that through all of the spiritual exercises he went through as a

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monk, he found no peace for his soul. He writes of that period of his life, "I had no love for that holy and just God who punishes sinners. I was filled with secret anger against Him."

In God's providence, his spiritual superior at the monastery was a wise man named John Staupitz. I really believe that John Staupitz understood the true gospel, and that we'll meet this man in heaven. Here's what Staupitz told Luther as Luther later recounts it. Staupitz said,

More than a thousand times I have sworn to our holy God to live piously, and I have never kept my vows. Now I swear no longer, for I know that I cannot keep my solemn promises. If God will not be merciful toward me for the love of Christ and grant me a happy departure, when I must leave this world, I shall never, with the aid of all of my vows and all of my good works, stand before Him. I must perish.

Staupitz went on to say this to Luther:

Look at the wounds of Jesus Christ, to the blood that He has shed for you: it is there that the grace of God will appear to you. Instead of torturing yourself on account of your sins, throw yourself in the Redeemer's arms. Trust in Him, in the righteousness of His life, and in the atonement of His death.

That's excellent gospel advice. He told Luther, "You need to begin to study the Scripture." And it was at this juncture in Luther's life that he began to do just that. He admits that prior to the age of about 21 or 22, he had never even known there was a Bible, never seen one, even though he was a monk. But it was at this age, under the urgings of Staupitz, that Luther began to examine the Scripture, when he first began to study the Bible. And as you know, he eventually became a professor of theology. And the time came when he was going to give a series of lectures on Paul's letter to the Romans. And of course, early on in that study he came, as we have, to Romans 1:16-17. I want to read to you an extended quote of Luther's struggle with these verses, because it goes to the crux of our study today. Listen carefully. Luther wrote:

I labored diligently and anxiously as to how to understand Paul's word in Romans 1:17, where he says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. As often as I read that declaration, I wished always that God had not made the gospel known, because this fuller revelation of the righteousness of God seemed to make me utterly hopeless and helpless. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God, with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that He was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. And secretly, if not blasphemously, I was angry with God and said, if indeed it's not enough that miserable sinners eternally lost through original sin are crushed by every kind of calamity by the Law of God, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel, threatening us with His righteous wrath. That's how he misunderstood. Now listen to what he says. Nevertheless, I beat importunately on Paul at that place [in other words, he's studying desperately to know what Paul meant], most ardently desiring to know what St. 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 that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous, shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

Luther later wrote, "As I had formerly hated the expression, 'The righteousness of God,' I now began to regard it as my dearest and most comforting word, so that this expression of Paul's became to me, in very truth, a gate to paradise."

It was this text in which Martin Luther found liberty for his soul, and it was through his understanding of this text that the Protestant Reformation began. Let's read it together, Romans 1:16-17:

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."

Now you notice that verse 16 introduces us to the theme of this letter, the gospel, and Paul tells us there're certain things about the gospel. But then, in verse 17, Paul gives us a brief exposition of the content of the gospel. The gospel is simply the message about the righteousness of God; that is, the righteousness that comes from God, and that He gives to sinners solely by grace, based on the life and death of Jesus Christ, and is received by faith alone. These two verses, then, establish the theme or the thesis of the entire letter.

Now we noted last week that Paul begins this brief statement of his thesis with a surprising negative. Notice verse 16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” We noted that in the historical context of the first century, shame was not merely a subjective feeling, it was an objective loss of status. To shame someone was to publicly humiliate them. When Paul says he was not ashamed of the gospel, he's admitting that the message he preached was considered to be a shameful message, foolishness, and he was marked as a fool, and as a man worthy of public shame, without honor, deserving of ill respect. But in spite of all of that, Paul says, he was not ashamed. Now what rationale did Paul give for ignoring the public shame that came with his message? Well, in Romans 1:16-17, Paul explains why he felt no shame, And as he explains his own lack of shame, he provides us with the reasons that we should never be ashamed of the gospel.

Last Sunday we looked at the first two reasons that Paul was not and that we should not be ashamed of the gospel. First of all, because it is God's power. The gospel is God's power. The Holy Spirit is in the gospel as it's presented, and He's in it powerfully to affect the results He desires. Sometimes, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2, that's to produce life; and sometimes the gospel seals a person's doom, because they will not respond to it. But regardless, it is the power of God. Every time you present the gospel, it is God's power at work.

Secondly, we shouldn't be ashamed of the gospel because it produces salvation. Notice what Paul writes: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation,” --unto spiritual rescue. It's amazing, but it is this foolish message, as Paul calls it, that God has decided to use to accomplish, to produce, spiritual rescue in the lives of people. When you share the gospel, God may very well be in that message calling sinners to Himself, so that they respond and experience spiritual rescue from their sins. We looked at what we're saved from last time: from God's wrath, from moral pollution, from eternal death, and so forth. And it is the gospel message that God uses to produce salvation. This is why we share the gospel, because it's in that message that God works to accomplish rescue.

Now today we come to the third reason that Paul was not and that we should not be ashamed of the gospel. A third reason: because the gospel requires no human work or merit. The gospel requires no human work or merit. Again, verse 16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God [unto] salvation to everyone who believes....” The gospel produces spiritual rescue for everyone who believes. Now, Paul is making a crucial point here. Paul everywhere contrasts faith and believing on the one hand, with all human work and merit on the other hand. And so he's saying the gospel comes, not to those who work, not to those who merit it, but rather, simply to those who believe.

Let me show you an example of this contrast. Turn over to chapter 4:1. As Paul begins to show that the message of the gospel (justification by faith that he's preaching) has its roots in the Old Testament, he chooses Abraham.

Verses 1:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?
For if Abraham was justified by works, [then] he has something to boast about....

If it was through his own effort that he achieved a right standing before God, then he can boast. And Paul recoils from that, and he said, that no-no, that can't be, not before God, that could never happen, so this can't be true. Verse 3: "For what does the Scripture say?..." And he quotes here from Genesis 15: "...Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now watch the contrast in verses 4 and 5: "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due." Tomorrow, you go to work. You work eight hours, and your employer keeps track of the number of hours that you've worked. And at some point, you get paid for those hours. Paul says, the money that you get from your work is not coming to you from your employer as grace; rather, you deserve it, you worked for it, you earned it. So on the one side, then, there is human work, and where there is human work, where there is human effort, you deserve what you get. Now look at the contrast in verse 5: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him..." You see the contrast? On the one side there is human effort, and you get what you deserve, you've earned it; on the other side is the absence of human effort, and that is believing. So understand, then, that faith is the absence of all human effort and work. It is not a human work. It does not merit anything with God. It does not achieve anything with God.

By the way, Paul makes this point in a number of other places. Look at rest of verse 5: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." So you see the contrast. Another passage where Paul makes this contrast is in Galatians 2:16. Paul goes out of his way to say the same thing three different ways to make his point. Galatians 2:16: "...knowing that a man is not justified [is not declared right with God] by the works of the Law [by keeping God's Law; by his own efforts to obey God] but through faith in [Jesus Christ]...." There's the first time: not works, but faith; faith's the opposite of working. "...Even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law...." There's the second time, same point. The contrast is between human effort, human merit, and faith. And just in case you didn't get it, he repeats it a third time: "...since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."

Paul wants us to understand, when he says in Romans 1:16, that the gospel is for everyone who believes, he means to say that the gospel comes to us without work, without human effort, without human merit.

Now go back to Romans 1. You'll notice in verse 16 the word "believes." In the New Testament, that verb *believe* and the Greek noun *faith*, they're one and the same. Each of those,

the noun form and the verb form, occur about 240 times each; four times in these two verses alone. Now, one other grammatical point to make here in verse 16, Again, looking at the word “believes,” in the Greek text, the word “believes” is in the present tense, as it normally is, by the way, when the word *believing* occurs. It literally could be translated this way: to the ones or the one who is believing. Paul's making an important point here, and that is that faith is not a onetime event; but real, true, Christian faith, saving faith, is a constant reality. You know, sometimes you'll hear people say, "Well, you know, I made a profession of faith in the past, and you know, I just have lived like I wanted since." Listen, that's not saving faith. Saving faith marks someone who not only believed at a point in the past, but that began a life of believing, a life of faith. It is a constant reality.

Now what exactly does it mean to believe? What is faith? Well, as we work our way through the Book of Romans, we're going to explain a lot about this, examine it in detail as Paul does. But let me just give you an intro, just so you have an overarching understanding of what faith is. The ways that the New Testament uses the word *faith* and the word *believe*, specifically in the Greek constructions, uncover three elements or three components of saving faith. Now, we can break them apart in order to examine them, but true, saving faith can't be broken apart, it comes as a package. Nevertheless, we can see these elements. Three elements of saving faith. If you're a Christian, you have exhibited all three of these elements.

Number one is knowledge. There is a knowledge component to faith. This is the foundation of true faith. You cannot believe what you don't know. Turn to Romans 10:8: Paul says let me tell you about the message of faith which I'm preaching, and here's the message. Verse 9: “...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and [here's our word] and believe in your heart that...” OK, there's knowledge that you have to have to exercise faith. You must believe in your heart this: “...that God raised Him from the dead, [and] you will be saved.” Now, the resurrection here is shorthand for what's true about Christ and what He accomplished in His life and death. It's not just the resurrection you have to believe.

In fact in 1 Corinthians 15, you remember Paul says, "Let me tell you the gospel I preach." It's “...that Christ died for our sins according to the [Scripture], ...that He was buried.” That is, that He really died, because the wages of sin is what: death. So He was buried. He really died in our place. “And... He was raised on the third day.” God raised Him to show that He'd accepted His sacrifice. And “He appeared” to many witnesses over those 40 days. That's the full gospel.

And so here when Paul says you must believe that God raised Him from the dead, he doesn't mean you just believe that. He means that is shorthand for, you believe everything that Jesus said about Himself, and everything He did and accomplished in His life. But you have to believe the facts; belief, faith, involves knowledge. In fact, look at verse 14: “How [shall] they believe in Him whom [they've] not heard?” You can't believe in somebody you haven't heard about,

because faith requires knowledge. This, by the way, is why we share the gospel with the people around us. The people in your life will never believe if they don't have the knowledge of the gospel. Look at verse 17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by [hearing the message about] Christ." So there has to be knowledge. That's element number one.

Element number two of faith is assent. In other words, being convinced that the knowledge you have gained from the Scripture about Christ and His work is factually true, and that you have a desire for it, that you're attracted to it. OK? So not only the knowledge, but the consent that it's true, and that you have a longing and desire that this is what you need. Look at verse 16. Here you see this element of faith; still in Romans 10. "However, [speaking of the Jews] they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'" They heard the message, they gained the knowledge, but they didn't agree with it, they didn't embrace it. It wasn't faith. So knowledge alone is not faith, it also involves assent.

There's a third element to faith. It also is here in Romans 10, and that is trust. Knowledge, assent, trust: this is heart of faith. And you see this in verse 9. Paul says here is the essence of the message of faith which we are preaching: "...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord..." You have to not only have the knowledge, you not only have to agree that that knowledge is true, you have to reach a point in your own life where you personally invest everything you are and everything you have in that person and in that knowledge. You transfer all of your reliance for pardon and righteousness away from yourself in total abandonment to Jesus Christ. You bank everything in your life, everything in your eternity, on Him, and Him alone for your salvation.

So when Paul speaks of faith then, understand that he is speaking in every case of those three elements: there must be a knowledge of the facts about Christ and the gospel, there must be an assent to those facts being true and desirable, but there also must be the entrusting of yourself to the person of Christ as well.

James Montgomery Boice likened these three elements of faith to the sort of progress that takes place in a human, romantic relationship between a man and a woman. If you're married, you understand this. It began, your relationship did, by accumulating some degree of knowledge about that other person. You learned certain facts about them. You learned about their background. You learned about their tastes and what they like and what they don't like. You accumulated information, knowledge. You can't have a relationship without knowing those things about a person. That, by the way, is the knowledge element of faith, Boice said. Then comes a point in your relationship when, based on the knowledge you've accumulated, your heart begins to move toward that other person. You find yourself attracted to them. You like what you learned, and you find yourself attracted to that person. Boice said that's the equivalent of assent. But then comes the day when you stand on a stage like this one, and you hold hands with that

person, and in the presence of God and other witnesses you say, "I do." You make vows. Boice said, that's like the trust element of faith.

If you're a true believer, then those things have happened. There was a time when you accumulated certain knowledge about the facts of Christ and the gospel. And then came a time when you were attracted to Christ, and you were attracted to those truths, and you wanted what He was offering, and you wanted a relationship with Him. But if you're a true Christian, there came a point in your life where you stood, as it were, before Him, and you said, "I do." You confessed Jesus as Lord.

Now, let me give you two important warnings about faith. Saving faith is not natural faith. You know, well intentioned people will say something like this: "You know you exercise faith every day. I mean, look at you, you're sitting in a pew. You're exercising faith in that pew at this moment. You believe it'll hold you up. Or you get on an airplane, and you believe that that airplane is going to take you into the sky and get you where you're going late, of course, but eventually get you there." Folks, that's not saving faith. That is simply living on mathematical probabilities. You have watched other people sit on pews. You have sat on pews, and you have understood in your own mind that there's a pretty good chance that if you sit on that pew even without testing it, it's going to support you. You're living by mathematical probabilities. Same thing with getting on an airplane. That's not saving faith. True saving faith is a supernatural gift from God. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace [are you] saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "It", there, either refers to faith alone, or it refers to the whole package of salvation which includes faith. Either way, faith is a gift from God. So believing is a human activity. If you're in Christ, you have believed in Him. But the reason you have believed is because God gave you the capacity to believe as a gift, and, therefore, here's the key, your faith has no merit. Your faith doesn't earn you anything with God, because God gave you that capacity.

There's a second danger when it comes to faith, and that's thinking that your faith is the grounds of your acceptance with God. There is a temptation, and I understand this temptation, I experienced it myself early in my Christian life, and that is, when you doubt your salvation, there is a temptation to go back to that event where you think you were saved and to ask yourself this question: "Did I have enough faith? Did I have enough faith?" Well, that question in and of itself assumes that God has some kind of divine scales in heaven on which He measures the quantity of faith, and He puts your faith on there, and if the scales tilt, you're in; if they don't, oh well. That's not it at all. That misunderstands the place of faith. Listen very carefully: God does not decide in the absence of our real righteousness to accept our faith as if it were righteousness. God doesn't say, "OK, he doesn't have any righteousness, but he has faith. OK, I'll accept that."

No, faith is not a valid substitute for righteousness, for that makes faith a work, which Paul has already said is not true. He always makes believing and working opposite each other. So our faith in Christ is not our righteousness. Christ's righteousness is our righteousness, as we'll see next week. Instead, Scripture always speaks of faith as the channel or the instrument through which we receive salvation. It says we are saved by faith, or through faith.

Faith is merely like our empty hand outstretched to receive the free gift of God's righteousness in Christ. Faith is the channel, the instrument, not the cause or the grounds. John Calvin, in the Institutes, compares faith to a kind of vessel or cup, with which we come empty and with the mouth of our soul open to seek the grace of God. That's faith. Paul says that the gospel is something I'm not ashamed of, because it is for everyone who believes. In other words, it requires no human effort or merit.

Perhaps you're here this morning and you understand Martin Luther, because you have on your own soul a weight of guilt, a sense of foreboding that one day you will die and stand before a holy God, and that there's no hope for you, and you would do absolutely anything you could to gain a right standing before God. Listen, the good news is you don't have to do anything. It's already been done by Jesus Christ. You simply have to believe in Him, who by grace alone declares ungodly sinners to be righteous solely on the basis of the perfect life and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. No wonder Paul wasn't ashamed.

We should never be ashamed of the gospel, because it is, number one, God's power; number two, it produces salvation; number three, it requires not human work or merit. The fourth reason that Paul gives that we should not be ashamed is that the gospel is God's universal message for every person. Verse 16: "It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

You know, it's interesting the categories of people that we have already met in this first chapter that Paul says can benefit from the gospel. In Romans 1:14, he divides all Gentiles, all non-Jewish people, into categories. First of all, there are the Greeks and the barbarians. We noted that those are the sophisticated and cultured, and the unsophisticated and the uncultured. He also divides the Gentiles in verse 14 into the wise and the foolish. These are the intelligentsia, the elite, the educated; and the uneducated, and the untrained, and the unlearned. And Paul says it's for all of them, for all the Gentiles, is his point.

Now in verse 16, Paul tells us that the entire world is the target of the gospel. He, notice, divides the entire world into two categories: Jew and Greek. Greek, as it's used in this context, is obviously different than it's used in verse 14, because here he contrasts it with the Jews. So, here Greek means everyone who isn't Jewish. It's another way of saying Gentile. This includes all the categories listed in verse 14. But Paul adds here in verse 16 it is "...to the Jew first and also

to the Greek.” Now that's remarkable when Paul says it's to the Jew first. Remember, he's the apostle to the Gentiles. He's writing this letter primarily to Roman churches that are composed of Gentiles, and still he says the gospel was for the Jews first. What does he mean by that? Well, I think he means the Jews first in two senses.

First of all, he means that the promise was made especially to the Jews, because they were God's chosen people. You remember back in Genesis 12, God chooses Abraham and says, "I'm going to make a nation out of you." He repeats it in chapter 15, chapter 17, again in chapter 22. And, then, in Exodus 19, when He's got the whole nation there before Him at Sinai, He says, "You are going to be My witness nation." God didn't choose the Jews just to choose them and to ignore the rest of humanity. He choose the Jews as the channel through which to make Himself known to the rest of the world. It was through Abraham's descendants that the gospel was to come to all men. What did Jesus say to the Samaritan woman in John 4:22? He said, "...salvation is from the Jews.” And we who are Gentiles are now, according to Romans 11, we are like the wild branch grafted into the olive tree, which are the Jewish people.

But I think Paul also means the gospel came to the Jews first in terms of time or chronology. Who was it that first received in the Old Testament Scriptures the message of the gospel? It was the Jewish people. What's the first mention of the gospel in the Old Testament? Genesis 3:15: the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. And that gospel only grows in our understanding as we work our way through the Old Testament. The gospel was preached to the Jews first during Christ's ministry. What did Jesus say to the Gentile woman in Matthew 15:24? "I was sent... to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus' ministry was focused on the Jewish people, although of course He ministered to Gentiles as well as a sort of a promise of what was coming when He commanded His Apostles to take the gospel to the whole world.

Even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, took the gospel to the Jews first in his ministry. In Acts 13:46, "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary [he's talking to the Jewish people here] that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.'"

But don't miss the point Paul is making in verse 16. When he says, "...to the Jew first [as well as] to the Greek[s]...", he's including everybody. Paul intends to show that the gospel doesn't discriminate. Look at Romans 10:11. After Paul's explained what it means to believe in God by faith, he says,

For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek [here again, Jew and Gentile]; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

The gospel doesn't discriminate, it's for everybody.

Now, we understand that in our minds, but I'm afraid too often we have a tendency to assume that there are certain groups beyond the reach of God's grace. Think about in your own mind. Are there people you think of, people in your life, people that you know of, that you just write off and say, there's no hope for that person? What about certain people groups, certain races, certain ethnicities, certain nationalities? I think in our time and era we might be tempted to think that of the Arab nations of the Middle East. Listen, our church has missionaries in that part of the world, because we believe the gospel is for them as well.

What about gross sinners? Are there people in your life who just do the worst of things, and you just sort of write them off and think, oh well, there's really no hope for them? The gospel's for them too. What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 6? He lists all these gross sins, and then he says to the people in Corinth, "Such were some of you; but you were washed." The gospel's for gross sinners too.

Maybe you're concerned on the other side. Maybe there are people in your life who are part of the elite, the powerful, the mighty of this world, and you look at them and you say, "I just don't know; they're just too proud, too elevated, too sure of themselves, too independent." Maybe you look at the power brokers of our world. Maybe you think this about our President, or about the leaders in Congress, or about other people in power, maybe business leaders, and you just think, no way. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, "...not many mighty, not many noble;..." but some.

What about the self-righteous, religious people? You look at people who are involved in cults, who are caught in cults of various kinds, who are incredibly self-righteous, who don't see themselves as sinners. Do you look at those people and think, "Oh well, I'll move past them and go tell someone who knows they're a sinner?" Listen, the gospel is for them too. Think about the Apostle Paul. He was trapped in the first century, false religion of Judaism that was a works-based system, and God saved him out of it. I want you to think about the people in your life. Folks, there is no one in your life beyond the reach of the gospel, and for whom it was not intended; no one you'll encounter. If we're honest, we have a tendency to ignore those who are different from us in race or national origin, who live grossly sinful lifestyles, or the elite and the powerful. But the gospel, Paul says, is appropriate for every person. It is God's universal message.

There's another application here. Maybe *you* think *you* are beyond the reach of God's grace. Tom, you just don't know. You don't know what I know about me. You don't know what God knows about me. You don't know what I've done. You don't know the person I've become. I don't, but God does. And the gospel is His good news of hope to everyone who will believe.

There's nothing that you have become, there's nothing you have done that is beyond the reach of the grace of God in Christ. Romans 10:13 says, "...whoever [calls] on the name of the Lord will be saved." The Bible ends in Revelation 22:17 with this invitation: whoever is spiritually thirsty, let him come; whoever wishes, let him take of the free gift of the water of life.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is God's power. It provides salvation, it requires no human merit or effort, and it is God's universal message for every person.

The fifth reason that Paul gives as to why we should never be ashamed of the gospel is that it promises righteousness. It promises righteousness. Now I just want to look and sort of introduce this point today. We'll look at it much more carefully next Sunday. But look at verse 17: "...in it [that is, in the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, '...the righteous man shall live by faith.'" Here Paul explains another reason that he was not ashamed of the gospel, and this reason is specifically about the content of the gospel message: it's about the righteousness that comes from God and is credited to the sinner. Now, that should shock you, because most contemporary presentations of the gospel are very man centered: God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. The gospel, on the other hand, is first and foremost about righteousness. You see, the gospel is God's answer to the age old question in Job 25:4: "How ...can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?" That's the question, and the gospel is the answer to that question. The central purpose of the gospel is to enable us to stand with righteousness in the presence of God.

Now, this word *righteousness* is a crucial word to understand. Both the Hebrew and the Greek nouns translated *righteousness* come from the sphere of law and courtroom, and both of them can be translated either *righteousness* or *justice*. Now in English, *righteousness* and *justice* are two very different words. But in Hebrew and in Greek, both *righteousness* and *justice* come from the same word group. Both have the fundamental idea of conforming to the Law, conforming to a standard. *Righteousness* describes someone's conformity to God's Law. If I keep the Law, if I conform to the Law, I'm righteous. *Justice* is God's responding rightly to that person based on their conformity or lack of conformity to God's Law, God's treating that person rightly based on whether they conform or don't conform to God's Law. That's justice.

Now, when *righteousness* is used with reference to God, it speaks of two things. When God is described as righteous, it means one of two things. First of all, it either's speaking of God's inherent, moral excellence, or secondly, of the rightness of His conduct. Let's look at the first one: His inherent, moral excellence. This is His character. Think of it this way: God *is* right. He *is* what is right in His person. A.W. Tozer writes, "When God acts justly, He is not doing so to conform to an independent criterion [something outside of Himself], but He is simply acting like Himself." Here's a very important statement; listen closely. Tozer writes, "Everything in the universe is good to the degree it conforms to the nature of God, and evil as it fails to do so. And

God perfectly conforms to the standard which is His own character, and therefore He is in and of Himself righteousness.” Deuteronomy 32:4 says of God, “The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.” Jeremiah 12:1: “Righteous are You, O Lord...” In John 17:25, Jesus refers to the Father as the “righteous Father.” This is His character. God is what is right.

But the second way God is described as righteous is pertaining to the rightness of His conduct. This is external to God. This is not His character, this is His actions. God not only *is* what is right, God *does* what is right. And He responds to other individuals based on their rightness or wrongness, based on their conformity to His Law. Psalm 89:14 puts it this way: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne...” What that means is that God's reign in the world is characterized by doing what is right. Psalm 145:17: “The Lord is righteous in all His ways...” You see, God is the standard. God is righteous, because He perfectly conforms to the standard which is His own character.

That's why Scripture tells us that it's absolutely impossible for our righteousness to ever satisfy God's standard of perfect law-keeping, perfect conformity to God, because He's the standard. I mean, Psalm 143:2, says, “...in Your sight [God, in Your sight] no man living is righteous.” Ecclesiastes 7:20: “...there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.” Isaiah 64:6: “...all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.” Apart from Christ, I want you to think about your finest moment, your greatest moment of righteousness, when you did something right, and it was when you did it with the purest of motives. The best moment of your life, God says, that is so far from meeting His standard, that in His sight it's like menstruous rags. It's unacceptable, your finest moment. Romans 3:12: “...there is none who does good, there is not even one.” I'm not the exception; you're not the exception: “...not even one.” You see, the reason none of us can never measure up to God's standard and earn our acceptance with God is that the very character of God Himself is the standard of what is righteous. However men may appear to us, they all appear equally guilty before God. While the kind of our sin, the degree of our sin, may be different, our standing before God is no different than the Middle Eastern terrorist you see on the news. Our standing before God is no different than a mass murderer. Our standing before God is no different than Hitler himself. We have failed to meet the standard of God's righteousness: His own character.

Can I just say, if you're here this morning and you are clinging to some hope that who you are or what you have done is somehow going to please God and satisfy God on the day of judgment, you are very sadly mistaken, and you are flying in the face of everything God has said in His Word. So how can we who are unrighteous by nature, [this is what Luther struggled with] how can we, who are unrighteous by nature and action, ever be right before a God of perfect righteousness? Look at Romans 1:17: “...in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed...”

What does Paul mean here by the “righteousness of God”? Well, we'll look at it next week, but let me give you a hint. Look at chapter 3:21: “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested...” And Paul says in verse 22, I'm talking about “...the righteousness of God [which comes] through faith in Jesus Christ for all ...who believe...” And look at chapter 5:17. He refers to it here as “the gift of righteousness.” The gift of righteousness. Martin Lloyd Jones writes this: “What is revealed in the gospel is God's solution, and God's solution is that God Himself provides us with the very righteousness that He demands.” That is the gospel. You see, the reality of God's providing us with the righteousness that He demands, that *is* the gospel. It's what theologians call *justification*. And, Lord willing, we'll consider it in detail next Sunday as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Table, and we'll look at the rest of verse 17. Listen, don't be ashamed of the gospel, because it promises you the gift of God's righteousness. Let's pray together.

Father, we are amazed at Your grace. When we contemplate Your righteousness, as we have just for a few moments, we see how desperately short we fall. We understand why You say that there is no one who is righteous in Your sight. We would have no hope, Father, except that in the gospel and through the work of Jesus Christ, You have promised us the gift of Your righteousness. Father, help us not to be ashamed of the gospel, because of what it promises sinners: the gift of righteousness. And Father, I pray for the person here this morning, and I'm sure there are a number, who have never exercised true saving faith. Father, maybe they've accumulated a lot of knowledge, maybe they even assent to the truthfulness of those facts they've accumulated, but Father, they've never come to the place where they've been willing to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, where they have trusted in Him alone for everything in life and eternity. Father, may this be the day when You work that in their hearts for Your glory. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.