



## Gospel Boldness

### Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series # 16

Romans 1:16-17

David Sunday

June 7, 2015

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea  
A great high Priest whose name is Love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me

My name is graven on His hands  
My name is written on His heart  
I know that while in Heaven He stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart  
No tongue can bid me thence depart

When satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end to all my sin

Because the sinless Savior died  
My sinful soul is counted free  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me  
To look on Him and pardon me

Behold Him there the risen lamb  
My perfect spotless righteousness  
The great unchangeable I am  
King of glory and of grace

One with Himself I cannot die  
My soul is purchased with His blood  
My life is hid with Christ on high  
With Christ my Savior and my God  
With Christ my Savior and my God

(Before the Throne by Vikki Cook &Charitie Lees Bancroft)

The words to this song should make us want to affirm of ourselves and of our church what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:16-17. Please turn there in your Bible. Such a great Savior! Such an awesome salvation! The only fitting response from those who have experienced His saving grace and power is to say with the Apostle Paul in 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 for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

What would you say is more important for a Christian—humility or courage? I hope as you think about that, you're thinking, "Well, I really couldn't choose one or the other." The

question I just asked is kind of like asking, "What's more important—inhaling or exhaling?" You need both of them desperately.

For a Christian, true humility is courageous because the humble Christian is not obsessed with self but with a cause that is greater than self. So true humility is courageous and true courage is humble because the courageous Christian realizes, "My strength and courage are in the Lord. It does not come from myself."

In these first 15 verses of Romans we see Paul's humility, then we see his courage. He is a humble man. Look at how he describes himself again in verse one: "*Paul, a servant, a slave, of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...*" In other words, "I am not living for myself. I am 100% sold out to advancing the gospel of the One Who called me and Who sent me to be His apostle."

He is humble in his attitude toward God's people, longing to go to the church in Rome and bring them encouragement that he's received from the gospel and also to receive encouragement through the gospel from them. His goal in wanting to go to Rome is in verse 12, "*...that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.*"

So this is a humble man who's amazed at the gospel and encouraged by it; who is not at all about himself. He's also a courageous man. Today we're going to focus on his courage and on the courage that should characterize our lives. We're going to focus on gospel boldness. My aim is that you would leave this message not just with clarity in your head but with fire in your heart.

Jim Elliot had that fire in his heart. In the 1950s he with his friends from Wheaton College to proclaim the gospel to the Auca Indians in Ecuador. He was a man who had no patience for spineless Christianity. Listen to what he wrote in his journal, lamenting the lack of courage in the church of his day:

We are so utterly ordinary, so commonplace, while we profess to know a Power this century does not reckon with. But we—we are harmless, and therefore unharmed. We are spiritual pacifists, non-militants, conscientious objectors in this battle to the death with principalities and powers in the high places. Meekness [or humility] must be had for contact with men, but brass, outspoken boldness is required to take part in the comradeship of the cross. We—we're sideliners, coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. The world cannot hate us. We are too much like its own. Oh, that God would make us dangerous.

There is a kind of boldness that makes the devil tremble. Paul had it. He wants us to have it too and he tells us how in these two short verses. These verses are like the epicenter of an earthquake whose aftershocks are going to ripple throughout this letter.

Paul is saying to the church, through his own testimony, “Church, I don’t want you to be on defense. I want you to be on offense for the gospel. I don’t want you to be so busy defending your end zone that you forget about the joy of scoring touchdowns.” He tells us how to be this kind of on-mission, gospel-advancing, courageous church in these verses.

### **A Gospel Gut-Check**

Let’s start with a look at what Paul says about his relationship to the gospel, his attitude to the gospel—in verses 14 through 16—asking yourself honestly, “Can I say what Paul says?” He says, verse 14, “I am under obligation,” or I am bound. I’m a debtor. God has entrusted something to me that I’m not meant to keep just for myself. I need to give it to others. *“I am under obligation...”*

Verse 15, *“So I am eager to preach the gospel...”* The logical reason why Paul is so eager and why he feels so indebted is because, verse 16, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel...”* That’s where logically it starts. Because of the fact that he’s not ashamed of the gospel, Paul can say, “I am eager. I am bound.”

Now, I don’t want to make the mistake of implying that all of us are called to do exactly what Paul did. Paul was an apostle, called to publically proclaim the gospel. This was his life. You have many different jobs that God has called you to serve in, and all of those vocations are things that you can be doing as unto the Lord, serving in a way that pleases Him. Not all of us are called to preach every day.

But all of us are called to give a bold testimony for Jesus wherever He’s placed us. All of us are called to be promoting the gospel. As a church we are to work together to have the same kind of gospel eagerness that we see in the Apostle Paul.

Through our giving, through using our gifts, through prayer and encouragement, through the ways in which we help each other, and through making friends with unbelievers and ministering the truth of Jesus Christ to them . Through all these means, we are to exemplify as a church the same kind of eagerness, boldness and unashamed attitude toward the gospel that the Apostle Paul had.

So as we look at the fact that he was eager to preach this gospel both to believers and to unbelievers—he was unashamed, bound, under obligation, ready, eager—the questions facing each of us are, “Has my experience of the gospel had the same effect in my life that Paul’s experience of the gospel had in his life? Can I say the same things about my experience of the gospel? Has it made me bound, under obligation, eager, unashamed? That’s the effect it had on Paul. Is it having that effect on me?”

If not, why not? One of the reasons we lack gospel boldness is we're tempted to be ashamed of the gospel. Jesus warned us of this in Mark 8:38. *"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* Jesus is warning us, "You're going to be tempted to be ashamed of Me and My words. Don't let that happen."

Paul had to warn the godly young pastor Timothy, *"Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God"* (2 Timothy 1:8). Therein lies one of the reasons we're tempted to be ashamed of the gospel, because the gospel calls us to share in suffering.

That brings us to our **main point: If you are following Jesus, you will be shamed for the gospel, but you must never be ashamed of the gospel.** You can expect to experience shame FOR the gospel if you're following Jesus, but you must never be ashamed OF the gospel.

Well, what is it that tempts us to be ashamed of the gospel? The gospel brings public disgrace. The gospel is an offense as we proclaim it to a world that is largely impressed with itself, that seeks self-actualization and self-salvation and finding my own path to God, whatever that may be.

In the gospel we say to the world, "Actually, you cannot save yourself. No matter how respectful you may be in the eyes of men, no matter how moral and upstanding you may be, you are not good enough to save yourself. In fact, you are so bad and your sin is so wicked it required the death of the Son of God on Calvary's cross to cover and pay for the guilt of your sin. That's how bad the situation is."

But the world says, "Oh, that's a gross exaggeration. No way. I'm not that bad. I'm good. And if you tell me I'm that bad, I'm going to bring shame and reproach upon you." The world hates hearing, "Oh no, you can't find your way to God. In fact, there is no one who's really seeking God. God had to come and find us. He sent His Son Jesus, Who *'came to seek and to save the lost'* (Luke 19:10). That's us. Therefore you can't find your way to God however you choose. Jesus is THE way, THE truth, THE life" (John 14:6).

That exclusive claim sounds to the world of today like intolerance and bigotry. The world is offended, so there's shame and reproach. Then the devil himself whispers lies in our ears like, "What if the gospel isn't true?" Paul was convinced it was true. He was convinced especially because of the truth in verse four that Jesus *"was declared to be the Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead..."* He is alive, Paul says. The gospel is true.

But the devil whispers in our ears, “Well, is the gospel really relevant to everyone?” Look at how many people in our lives don’t even care at all about the gospel, aren’t concerned at all about the questions that the gospel addresses. They’re not thinking about, “How can I be right with a holy God?” The devil asks, “Is the gospel relevant for everyone?”

Paul says, “Oh, yes it is and I am eager to preach this gospel to anyone and to everyone because everyone stands equally in need of salvation.” Because Paul had this confidence in the gospel, he was willing to suffer shame and reproach for it. If you follow Jesus you will also be shamed for the gospel. Be ready for that.

Listen to the shame Paul experienced in 2 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NASB). He says, “This is what I’ve gone through to advance the gospel. Far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number.” Let’s take that phrase. “Beaten...times...without number.” This is the man who’s telling us, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel.”

*I've been chained for the gospel. I've been beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren.*

That’s all in a day’s work for the Apostle Paul. “This is what my life is like: being shamed, suffering reproach, experiencing disgrace for the gospel of Jesus. Oh, I am shamed—but I am not ashamed of this gospel,” Paul says.

What did Jesus experience?

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood.

(Hallelujah! What a Savior by Philip P. Bliss, 1875)

Jesus experienced mocking insults. Punching and spitting in our Savior’s face. Scourging with 39 lashes across His back. His head lacerated with a crown of thorns. Then stripped of His clothing and nailed to a cross where He was exposed before the scorners’ eyes as a hideous fool, Who “*saved others but could not save Himself*” (Mark 15:29-32).

Jesus was shamed for the gospel. What did He do with that shame? Hebrews 12:2 tells us, “*...for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame...*” Not letting shame rule over Him—not letting shame make Him ashamed, so that He would shrink back from that cross. Oh, no. For the joy that was set before Him He endured it and said,

“Shame, you are not going to dictate to Me how I am going to respond to God. I will boldly and obediently submit Myself to the Father’s will for the salvation of the world.” That’s what Jesus did. He was shamed for the gospel, but not ashamed of it.

If we are bold for Jesus, we will suffer shame. Count on it. That shame might just be someone you love looking at you and thinking, “I can’t believe you really believe, in this world today, that people who do not believe in Jesus are destined for hell. Are you serious? I don’t know if I can even respect you if you think like that. I can’t believe you believe that all of us are so sinful we need that kind of salvation—really? I don’t need that. I’m okay.”

The world also says, “Do you really believe that if anyone wants to follow Jesus he’s got to deny himself, take up his cross daily and suffer for Him? Really? I want my life to be easy and comfortable. I don’t want this ‘Calvary Road.’”

You will be shamed and that shame might just look like loss of respect and popularity in the eyes of the world. It might look like, “You’re not going to get a promotion because you’re too committed to following the way of the cross.” It can take on many forms. Shame is unavoidable. But being ashamed is unacceptable. *“I am not ashamed of the gospel,”* Paul says in 1:16.

Now, if you believe what Paul believed about the gospel, you will be able to stifle the sneering voice of shame, standing with boldness and advancing the gospel with courage. How was it that Paul was so bold? What enabled him to stifle the sneering voice of shame and stand with such courage for the gospel? It’s because Paul had two unshakeable convictions about the gospel.

### **Unshakable Conviction #1 About the Gospel**

The first conviction is this: the gospel does not merely bring power or have power—it IS power. You’ve got to believe that. It’s not a concept or a philosophy. It is power. Paul says, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for...”* Here’s the reason: *“...it is the power...”* That word is *dunamis*. What does *dunamis* sound like? Dynamite. The gospel is divine dynamite. It’s the power of God. It’s not just a concept. It’s not just a philosophy. It’s not just an idea to think about. It IS power.

Listen to Tim Keller:

In the gospel words and power come together. The gospel message is actually the power of God in verbal, cognitive form. It’s alive. It takes ahold of you. It lifts you up. It transforms. It changes everything, and when we explain this gospel and proclaim this gospel, power from God is being released.

I love the way a Syrian bishop in the fifth century illustrated this power. His name was Theodoret and he said that the gospel is like a pepper. You put the pepper in your mouth, and outwardly it seems to be cold and tasteless. But then you crunch it between your teeth and what happens? Fire! It's hot. Burning. In the same way, Theodoret said, the gospel can appear at first like an interesting theory or philosophy. But if we take it in personally, if we "crunch" it, it will be full of fire and power.

Have you done that? Have you taken in the gospel personally? Have you experienced its fire and power in your life? Do you know what Paul is talking about here? It is the power of God. Do you see that? That's why he's not ashamed. It's not just an idea. It's not just a philosophy. It's the power of God...for what? Salvation.

What is salvation? It's rescue from God's wrath at the final judgment. Right now people say, "I don't need that." All they care about is what other people think about them, but they don't care about what God thinks about them. But there's going to come a day when the only Person's opinion that will matter at all is God's—at the judgment.

The only thing that will rescue you from God's wrath at the judgment and bring you salvation is the gospel and your reception of that gospel. It's the power of God for salvation, for rescue from God's wrath in the final judgment.

What else is salvation? It's restoration to the glory of God that we lost through sin. Romans 3:23 tells us, "*...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Our lives have been now robbed of glory. We have now lost our sense of dignity and purpose that we were designed to have. The experience of God and the worship of God have been squandered in our lives. But the gospel of salvation reinstates us to that glory. It touches the deepest yearnings of our heart. It answers questions like, "Does my life matter? Is there anything in my life that will survive the ultimate death that I'm going to experience?"

I love how Ray Ortlund defines salvation. He says, "The gospel is God announcing that there is a power to heal the sorrows of our success, the ugliness of our pride and the death in our self-centered lives."

"This is why I'm not ashamed," Paul says. "[I]t's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." So it's available to all—everyone and anyone—"...to the Jew first..." because Jesus was a Jew and the promises came through the Jews and through the Old Testament. But it's "...also to the Greek..."—for all the nations. The only condition is belief on Jesus.

And what does that look like? It means saying to Him:

Nothing in my hands I bring,

Simply to Your cross I cling;  
Naked, come to You for dress;  
Helpless, look to You for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

(Rock of Ages by Augustus M. Toplady, 1776)

Paul says, "This is why I'm not ashamed: the gospel is God's power to save everyone who believes."

There are two implications before we move on to the second conviction.

- It's always—always—about the preaching, not the preacher. The gospel is the power of God, not the presentation or who's presenting it. The power is in the message. God uses weak, frail, messed-up people to proclaim a glorious, red-hot, on-fire message. When that message gets out and comes into a person's life, through the power of God's grace and the Holy Spirit working in their life they take that message in. They forget the messenger and they encounter the One Whom the message is all about. That's what we need. When we get overly preoccupied with who's proclaiming the message and all the finery of how it's proclaimed, we end up muting the message and its power. Let our focus be on the power of the gospel, not being enamored by those who proclaim it.
- Secondly, we believers should never tire of hearing the gospel ourselves, for you and I need the gospel today just as much as your atheist neighbor needs the gospel today. You need the gospel just as much as your Muslim friend needs the gospel. You need the gospel just as much as anyone else, because you know who's the worst sinner you know? You are. No one knows your sin better than you do, other than God.

If you look at yourself honestly, the sinner you know the best is yourself and if you know yourself, you know that you need the gospel today just as much as you needed the gospel the first moment you believed in Jesus. You probably realize even more how much you need the gospel today.

So, believers, never tire of hearing the gospel. It's the power of God! If I'm bored with it, either I'm missing the message, it's not being proclaimed in its clarity or I need a revival in my heart. I need that gospel revival all the time in my life.

The only way God ever saves anyone is through this gospel. The only way God ever saved anyone in the Old Testament was through this gospel. The only way God ever saves anyone today is through this gospel, and it is powerful. That's Paul's first conviction.

## **Unshakable Conviction #2 About the Gospel**

Conviction number two: because Paul believes this, he is a debtor, he is eager and he is not ashamed (verse 17). Paul believes that in the gospel, God reveals what none of us would have ever known, found or guessed on our own. We would have never figured this out.

How can sinners receive righteousness from God through faith? How can sinners be declared righteous before a holy God? We would have never figured out the answer apart from the gospel. But Paul says in verse 17, *“For in it...”* Here’s why the gospel is so powerful. *“For....”* See all these ‘for’ words? The gospel is the power of God. What is it about the gospel that it’s so powerful? *“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed.”*

What is the righteousness of God? Righteousness is the scepter of His throne. He does what is just and right always and unfailingly. Righteousness is an attribute of God. Righteousness is also an activity of God. He makes known His salvation and righteousness when He reaches out to rescue people who are under the bondage of their sin. So righteousness is an attribute. Righteousness is His saving activity to rescue sinners.

Thirdly, righteousness is also an achievement of God. It’s something that He accomplishes on the cross. It’s God being able to remain just and not lowering His standards for an instant to remain perfectly righteous, and at the same time being able to declare righteous people who are sinful. It’s God’s ability to declare sinners just, to declare sinners not guilty and to clothe them with His righteousness and to give them a new status: right with God.

So righteousness is God’s attribute, it’s His activity and it’s His achievement on the cross. I love how Ray Ortlund puts this. “God has a conscience. God can’t just wink at sin.” He has a conscience. He’s holy. He can’t overlook sin. But here’s the righteousness of God: “The all-holy God found a way to smile on sinners and uphold His standards.” I love that. That’s the righteousness of God in the cross of Christ. Christ satisfied God’s conscience for us.

The most important question you could ever ask is how can I be right with a holy God? There’s only one answer. It’s not through your own righteousness. That’s what’s revealed in the gospel.

Trying to be right with God through your own righteousness is like going to Target, filling up your cart with a bunch of stuff and going to the cashier. She rings it up and says, “This is what you owe”—let’s say it’s \$500—and you pull a bunch of Monopoly money out of your pocket and say, “Here you go.” She looks at you and says, “Sorry, we don’t take that here.” “Oh, okay.” You pull out a \$10,000 Monopoly bill and now she’s looking for that security button. What’s going on? “We don’t take that kind of money here”

When we try to get right with God through our own righteousness, we’re using currency that’s not acceptable in heaven. The only currency that’s acceptable in heaven is God’s perfect

righteousness. God has found a way for sinners like us not only to be forgiven of our sin—that's only half the good news—but actually to be clothed in His righteousness.

It's not for God to just say, "I'm wiping your slate clean," but for God to say, "I am now filling a treasury of merit that Christ has obtained through His own blood on the cross. His righteousness, which is infinite and endless, is now your righteousness. So no matter what sins you may commit in the future, you are now clothed in the righteousness of Christ and you may now draw upon the righteousness of Christ for you."

*"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

That's the best news in the world! God will take away all your sins and will wipe the slate clean. God will remove every trace of guilt, and He will then clothe you in righteousness. He will credit you the infinitely rich supply of Jesus' righteousness so that you'll never again have a debt of sin that cannot be satisfied by Christ's merit.

How do you get that? Believe. It's the only way. In the face of all your guilt and sin and shame, put your trust in Jesus. Come to Him broken to be mended, wounded to be healed, desperate to be rescued, guilty to be pardoned by the blood of Christ—and you will be welcomed with open arms by God.<sup>i</sup> Come to Jesus. It's by faith from first to last.

At the end of verse 17, Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4, *"...the righteous shall live by his faith."* Another way you could translate that verse is "those who by faith are righteous shall live." Or, if you look at the ESV footnote, "The one who by faith is righteous shall live." Through the rest of Romans 1-4, Paul is going to show us what it means to be righteous by faith. Then in chapters five through eight, he's going to show us what it means to live a new life in the Spirit.

I want to close where we began with a word about boldness. The need of this hour is for courageous Christians, people who understand the gospel is power, people who understand the gospel reveals the need—the greatest need, the most desperate need—of the human heart: how can people be right with God? How can sinners be right with God?

In our day and age, we need courage to be faithful to this gospel—to stand true to this gospel. If you believe that the gospel is God's power, and if you believe that God's righteousness is being revealed in this gospel, you will go into this world playing offense, not defense. You will have courage in the face of a world that will at times call you bigoted and intolerant, even if you're not. You will be dangerous to the devil. When the world tells you to back down about Jesus and the gospel, you will answer with courage and love.

I want to read you the words of a young Rwandan man who in 1980 was forced by his tribe either to renounce Christ or to face certain death. He refused and they put him to death on

the spot. The night before he died, he wrote the following commitment to the Lord. They found this in his room and it exemplifies the kind of courage we are being called to here in these verses:

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. Why? My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed vision, worldly talking, cheap giving and dwarfed goals. I'm done with that.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my Guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I won't give up, shut up, let up until I've stayed up, stored up, prayed up for the cause of Jesus Christ. I must go 'til He comes, give 'til I drop, preach 'til everyone knows, work 'til He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no trouble recognizing me because my banner will have been clear.

May that be true of us!

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from "Just As I Am" by Travis Cottrell