

ROMANS

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1:16–17

THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION? (ROM. 1:16–17)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

These two verses are the thesis of Paul's letter to the Romans, and therefore very important. Paul first says that he's not ashamed of the gospel. It's easy for Christians to be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel because it is so contrary and opposed to all other worldviews. Paul, unlike other so-called "apostles," proclaimed even the hard parts of the gospel when so many thought it silly or scandalous.

Paul goes on to say that he's not ashamed of the gospel (even though it seems so odd to many) because in it is the power of God to save people from their sins. It sets people free precisely because it is the means through which individuals who were once estranged from God are reconciled to him. Because of Jesus, our trust in God restores what is lost when we sin: the life-giving divine presence. When people are reconciled to God, God's righteousness is revealed because his promises to Adam, Eve, and Abraham are fulfilled, and his purposes for the creation restored.

2.0 ROMANS 1:16–17 THE SALUTATION

2.1 NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

Much like during Paul's time, the nature of reality revealed in Christ is starkly different (and set in opposition) to non-Christian worldviews. Unlike the world around us, we believe in:

- One triune God, not a plethora of gods, or a consciousness at the heart of the universe.

- The single most important event in history is Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.
- The single most important person in history is a Jewish carpenter who lived 2000 years ago and was suffered a criminals death.
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
- Jesus is the judge of the entire universe.
- Jesus is the only way to God, not one of many ways to God.
- The gift of the holy spirit is real experience, not the name we give our religious consciousness.
- The church is a gathering of the saints for service to God, not a religious society with backward beliefs and Victorian-era morals.
- Jesus will return and all will bow to him, including Jews, Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and Scientologists.
- There will be a final judgment after which there will follow everlasting life or everlasting destruction for every human in the world

These beliefs are "grievously offensive" to non-Christians. How dare Christians say their way is the only way to God, that a hookup culture demeans our sexuality, that marriage is for men and women, that abortion is not okay, that we should worship a rabbi that lived 2000 years ago.

We have two options: (1) be ashamed of the gospel, or embrace the shame of the cross.

Being ashamed of the gospel means to capitulate to surrounding culture.

"Why stand up and get ridiculed for Jesus when metaphorically kneeling before a hundred-foot tall golden statue of Oprah draped in a rainbow sash will get you accepted in the public square?" (M. Bird, Romans, 48)

2.2 THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION

We're not ashamed of the gospel because it sets people free. The problem is sin, and the only remedy for sin is reconciliation with God. Jesus is the means for that reconciliation. The problem is that we lose the divine presence for which we are created, and the only solution is the restoration of that presence. That presence is only restored through the atoning work of Jesus.

2.3 FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE

Faith/trust is the way of salvation because it is a relationship that is lost in rebelling against God. The reconciling work of Christ puts God's trustworthiness on display. You think he doesn't love you? You think he's not trustworthy? You think he's out for your harm? Look to the cross. That trust unites us with Jesus who is the first born of the new creation. It makes us part of the Jesus race of people who are united with God and whose wounds are healed.

2.4 FOR THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO FOR THE GREEK

The purpose of the law is to reveal sin. The Jews, having the privilege of having the law, understand that they are sinners. This is why we see all of Judea going out to be baptized by John. They are aware of their sin. Having first access to the law means getting a head start on acknowledging sin. This is why the Jew first. A failure to acknowledge sin will prevent one from accepting the redemptive work of Christ (this is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit).

2.5 THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

God promised Adam and Eve that he would take care of the serpent (Gen. 3:15); God also promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. Until Jesus, none of those promises were fulfilled. Now, because of Jesus, God has fulfilled his promise and—by extension—revealed his righteousness. Secondly, God's purposes for the creation to be filled with his goodness. This hasn't happened. Evil runs amuck in the world. As people are reconciled to God through Jesus, and the life of Jesus is born in the world through the church, God's purposes for the creation are fulfilled.

3.0 CONCLUSION

1. **Are you ashamed of the gospel?** You're ashamed of the gospel if you're afraid to share it, too intimidated to uphold it; too lazy to teach it; too selfish to live a life worthy of it; when you make other things the center of fellowship; when you affirm any political, economic, or social position that denies what the Lord Jesus taught about the poor, the orphan, the sick, the elderly, or the homeless; when you spend more money on

chocolate than charity; when your social life becomes more important than your church life; when you spend more time combing your hair than active in prayer.¹

2. **Are you reconciled to God?** Have you accepted his forgiveness? Have you forgiven yourself? Do you exhibit the fruit of the Spirit? Do you love people the way that Jesus loves people? Are you quick to forgive? Do you talk to him regularly through active prayer?
3. **Do you trust God with all matters in your life?** Do you worry? If so, what do you worry about the most? Do you Sabbath? Do you obey him even when it doesn't make sense or when it's uncomfortable?
4. **Do you live with a posture that is always ready and quick to repent when sin is revealed in your life?** How often do you repent? How often do you ask forgiveness? Do you regularly sense the Holy Spirit convicting you when you read the Scriptures? Do you invite God to search your heart? Do you make excuses for your sin? Do you treat people equally?
5. **Do you embody the righteousness of God in the world?** Do you bring joy and peace to the world around you? Can you identify times when God has used you to be an agent of healing to the people around you? Do you point people to Jesus?

¹ This list comes from Michael Bird, *Romans* (the Story of God Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 50.