

Romans 1:16-17 - Faith

ROMANS SERMON #3

September 17, 2017

Passage: Romans 1:15-17 "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."

There is a real temptation to be ashamed of the Gospel.

The Gospel is the announcement of the victory that has been won on our behalf by Jesus when he triumphed over Satan, sin, and death on the cross and by rising from the grave. The announcement that Jesus has triumphed over death is the greatest news ever told and the most powerful message there is. But it doesn't often seem that way.

And there can be a temptation that Paul alludes to here in verse 16 to be ashamed of it. Especially in a place like Rome.

Rome at the time of Paul dominated the world. 1 in 4 people lived in the Roman Empire, and it stretched from Spain to Syria, from England to Northern Africa. It was powerful, it was rich, the elite citizens were educated, it's army was efficient and sophisticated, they subjugated whole nations, often through fear and terror. Roman soldiers nailed criminals to crosses. So Rome was a power that had taken over the world, they knew how to get stuff done and change the world.

And here comes Paul with the message of the Gospel. Which would have been mocked by many in Rome - for the same reasons it is mocked today.

It can seem anti-intellectual. This gospel message has this almost unbelievable story at the heart of it that a man rose from the dead. You don't have to be all that educated to know that people don't rise from the dead. So that can seem so foolish. And you're almost ashamed to admit you believe it - it's like admitting you believe the world is flat or that you think the Bills will go to the playoffs this year. Really? Such a silly belief.

And it can seem so against science. I once heard Bill Mahr say that if all of the world's knowledge were wiped out, we would, over time, rebuild our scientific knowledge. We'd discover the same law of gravity, the laws of motion, we'd discover the atom, we'd rediscover the heliocentric model of the solar system. But we would never again discover Christianity. Because it isn't based on science and any real learning, he would say.

It can seem useless. There's also a temptation to be ashamed of it because it doesn't seem like a real solution. I saw a meme last week that I'm sure wasn't new to Hurricane Harvey, of the back of an empty moving truck with the words "*First shipment of thoughts and prayers arriving in Texas.*" And the gospel can seem like those thoughts and prayers that don't seem to do much. On the surface it doesn't seem to do much for a cancer patient or an abuse victim or someone struggling with relationships to hear "Jesus died for you." That doesn't sound like a solution.

We have felt needs for ourselves, things we think the world needs or that the church needs, and the gospel can seem like an empty moving truck.

It can seem like a giant waste of resources. The amount of energy and effort and time and dollars that go into spreading and perpetuating that message, for Paul the loss of everything and the efforts to travel the world

to proclaim it, can seem incredibly foolish. People don't need words, they need action - we think. They don't need a creed, they need deeds - we think. And there can be a tendency to be very ashamed of a devotion to that creed or a life given to spreading it.

It can seem unspectacular. There's a temptation to be ashamed of it because it doesn't look big or spectacular enough. When God shows up in power there have to be sparks somewhere, and this message doesn't always seem to generate them.

So a brilliant, educated Roman citizen like Paul might be very tempted to downplay it, minimize it, or be ashamed of it.

But Paul isn't intimidated by the wise, by the consumers who want more, by the people who think it's overemphasized, by the people who think there must be some better way to change the world.

He pushes back hard and doubles down on the priority of this message. They say, "Paul, you're talking about this gospel too much." He replies with "gospel gospel gospel". No accommodation at all, no shame at all. Because look at what he says in verse 16:

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.

He says I am not ashamed of the Gospel at all because it is the power of God.

Sure it looks weak and foolish. It looks like an empty moving truck. It doesn't immediately address what we think our biggest needs are.

But Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of it at all because in reality it is power. It's a greater power than Rome's intellect or Rome's military or Rome's efficiency. It's the power of God.

It's the greek word dunamis - the word they used to name dynamite, and where we get our word dynamic. It means intrinsic strength or might, it is the opposite of weakness. It can seem on the surface like it is just words, or a silly fantasy, or an empty moving truck. But when it is exposed for what it really is, it is the power that far exceeds the power of Rome.

He says it is the power of God for salvation.

Rome had the power to take over a country (they did it with Israel) and through force and terror make them subjects of Caesar. This Gospel has subjugating power: power to bring people under the Lordship of an even greater king, King Jesus.

Rome seemed to be on the march to take over the world, but they stuttered and collapsed and failed. This gospel will march on through the ages until the King returns and puts every enemy under his feet¹, every nation bowing before the king. It brings the promise that He will one day return and renew the whole creation.

Rome was going to fail at taking over the world, but the Gospel was going to go out to all nations. Paul says it is to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. The Gospel is a universal claim that Jesus rules and reigns, and it is a call for all people to bow before Him as the ultimate one.

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet."

Rome could get individuals to behave through terror. But the Gospel message takes enemies of God and reconciles us to Him for now and for all eternity, guaranteeing us everlasting life. It makes us not the subjects of God who submit out of fear, but sons and daughters who submit out of love. It's the power of God for salvation. It has the power not only to bring out outward conformity, but an inward change, so that not only do we submit to the authority of King Jesus but delight in it.

Rome constantly had rebellions and uprisings and they had to govern by fear to put the people down. The gospel snuffs out rebellion at the source.

Salvation brings the dynamic change of a person. Keller writes, "The gospel's power is seen in its ability to completely change minds, hearts, life orientation, our understanding of everything that happens, the way people relate to one another..."² It isn't an empty moving truck, but the power of God for salvation, which changes everything, and becomes the gas in the tank of a thousand moving trucks bringing all kinds of good to the world.

And if the Gospel is the power that accomplishes the ultimate feat: connecting man to God and dynamically changing a person, then it is nothing to be ashamed of.

It is the power of God for salvation.

What makes it so powerful?

17 - For (notice the connection word here - for - what makes the message the power of God for salvation? Answer:) **in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."**

² Timothy Keller, *Romans for You* (Round Hill: The Good Book Company, 2014), 20.

The power of this message is that it unveils the righteousness of God. God's righteousness revealed is a greater power than the entire Roman army.

There's this beaming light with a cover over it, and if you can just uncover it it'll drive out all the darkness - that light is the righteousness of God and the Gospel uncovers it.

So what is the righteousness of God?

Stott says that the righteousness of God is an attribute of God, an activity of God, and an achievement of God rolled up in one.³

God's Righteousness, His Attribute

It's this **attribute** - that God is righteous - He is holy, He is perfect, and He is good. And God's righteousness as an attribute is seen on the cross. Jesus is punished there, so we can see God's perfect judgment on sin carried out. He is punished for us there, so we see God's goodness and kindness. He pays the price perfectly with no debt left for us to pay, we see His perfection and his plan there. When people ask, "How can I believe God is good?" we can point them to the cross. His righteousness is revealed there. And Paul will spend some significant time in Romans showing God's perfect righteousness to those who might accuse Him of failing, or of not being good. The Gospel shows Him to be perfectly righteous.

God's Righteousness, His Activity

But the righteousness of God is also God's righteous **activity**. His plan through the ages to bring about the redemption of a people and the restoration of the world. God comes to our rescue in the story of the Gospel. And when we look at the world and wonder if God has failed to do what He said He would do with His creation, if He has left us, if He is no longer

³ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994), 63.

involved, in the Gospel we have the message that God gave His son - that's the opposite of a deadbeat dad, it's Daddy Warbucks delighting to pour out the riches of His kindness on us, the objects of His mercy, for all eternity.⁴

God's Righteousness, His Achievement

God's righteousness is also an **achievement** of God - it's something he achieves for us. He gives us his righteousness. So we can be in a good relationship with him and part of the new world He is making.

The Gospel announces who God is, what God does, and what God does FOR US. No matter who we are, our greatest need is to have God cover our sins and give us a relationship with him.

And when we think it doesn't meet the need of the moment, the pushback answer is: "You don't even know your greatest need then."

So this is the greatest news ever, the greatest power, and the answer for everyone's deepest question and longing, the cure for everyone's biggest disease. Who am I? What was I made for? Who is my creator? What do I do with my guilt? How do I get right with him? How can I ever have peace with God after breaking it so badly? What do I need to do to be saved? How can I be OK? How can I be fixed? What does the future hold? Is there any hope for this dark and broken world? Is there hope for a failure like me?

The answers to all of those longings and questions and need are given in the Gospel. It is the power of God because it reveals the righteousness of God.

Which can all be good news if you're on the right side of the story.

⁴ Ephesians 2:4-7 "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." See also Romans 9:23.

The righteousness of God as revealed in the gospel can be a terrifying thing. The attributes that we love about God when they're *for us* are terrifying when they're *against us*. The righteousness of God turns people to dust in the Bible.

You love a great defensive end when he's on your team, but when you're an opposing quarterback with a weak line, you're going to have a terrible day because of him.

The fact that there's a strong army is only encouraging when that army is protecting you. It isn't encouraging when that army is invading you.

And God's attribute of righteousness can, and really should, be terrifying to us at first glance. The perfectly Holy God with eyes like fire⁵ who sees it all, who is coming to judge the earth⁶ as part of his righteous activity of setting things right, that's terrifying. We want to be on His team.

So how do we get on the right side? Here's the answer:

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

The answer is: by faith.

Getting on the right side of that righteousness is not something we can work to do at all. It isn't earned, but received by faith.

Receiving God's righteousness by faith has proven to be a power that out-blows Rome and has outlasted Rome.

This is the verse that 500 years ago radically rocked the world of Martin Luther. He was a monk who started out seeing the righteousness of God as

⁵ Revelation 19:12

⁶ Psalm 96:13

an attribute - that God was perfectly holy. And he hated Him as a result. He said he actually hated the righteousness of God because it was nothing but terrifying to him. He saw rightly that the perfection and power and justice of God can totally destroy us.

Luther, looking at that righteous attribute of God said this:

*"My situation was that, though an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him."*⁷

And this is the right response to seeing God's righteous attribute. This was how Isaiah responded to a vision of God's glory and majesty: **"And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5)**

Nobody senses the righteousness of God and says, *"I really need to buy a Jesus is my homeboy tee-shirt. We're BFFs now."* Isaiah didn't see the glory of God and start looking for the merch table. He was undone.

Luther likewise, so he tried to figure out how he could cure his own sinfulness in light of God's righteousness. He spent weeks fasting, was devoted to prayer, he had extended confession sessions of up to six hours, but he'd always leave feeling like it wasn't enough and he forgot to confess a sin. Not to mention all the sins he's wasn't aware of. So he tried estheticism, extreme self-denial (sleeping on cold stone floors without blankets, climbing a staircase in Rome on his knees) and just never felt he could do enough to measure up to a righteous God's standard. So he hated the standard - he hated God's righteousness.

⁷ Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther. New York: Meridian, 1995. 49

But then he studied Romans. And Romans 1:17 hit him like the power of God that it is.

"Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on new meaning, and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage became to me a gate to heaven. If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love."⁸

He looked at God's righteousness, knew he could never measure up, and tried and tried to make himself acceptable to God. He tried to make himself OK. But fighting off his sin was like playing whack-a-mole and he never made progress. So the righteousness of God was only something to be feared.

But then he saw verse 17. **"The righteous shall live by faith."**

"The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith."

In the Gospel we also learned about his righteous activity, how he came to rescue us. And there we saw the righteous achievement - that He gives us his righteousness.

And we receive God's righteousness that can finally make us right with him by faith. Not by our afflicting ourselves and sacrificing and being more

⁸ Roland H. Bainton, [Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther](#). New York: Meridian, 1995. 49-50

scrupulous and more meticulous or by being better. We receive an alien righteousness, the righteousness of God, by faith.

Romans 4:3 “For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

The righteousness of God isn't earned by a prayer we pray, an aisle we walk, the water we're dunked in, the amount we give up, the amount we know, the moral achievements, by the social achievements, by political wins.

The only righteousness that could allow us to measure up to the righteousness of God is the righteousness of God. The only thing God-sized is God. We need God to get to God. And in the Gospel, God gives us God.

We could never earn Him, so we receive him by faith.

But what is saving faith?

Because the Bible talks about faith that can't save you.

James 2, verses 14 and 19 talk about a faith that can't save, and a kind of believing that even the demons have.

So it's important that we have real saving faith because that's the only way we receive the righteousness of God and get on the right side of it.

1. Saving Faith must have the right object

Faith by itself is not necessarily good. Just like love by itself isn't necessarily good, and hate isn't necessarily bad.

Love is good if you love your spouse, but love is bad if you love to shoplift. If you love the devil, you're psychotic.

Hatred is bad if it is directed to a person, but good if it's directed at your sins or toward injustice in the world. (In that sense we all need to hate a whole lot more. Please don't tweet that out of context.)

And faith is good if it has the right object - if you believe in Jesus. But can be a bad thing:

If you believe the crazy promises of a phony faith healer or televangelist and send in your money, we wouldn't say "at least you had faith." We'd said your faith was misplaced and wasn't good.

BIG FAITH in BIG LIES will let you down BIGLY.

So faith isn't good or bad by itself, it depends on the object.

So it isn't faith in general that saves us.

It is Jesus who saves us through faith in Him.

If you google man's first attempts to fly, there's an old black and white video of a guy who made a bird suit where he could flap his wings and, he thought, fly. So he gets on top of a tall boulder, jumps off, and crashes immediately down with the bird suit crashing on him. He had a lot of faith, but the object of his faith couldn't make him fly. It was misplaced faith. Lots of confidence, and a broken nose.

But let's say that you, today, are terrified of flying. But you go to the airport, you get on the big 747, buckle in tightly, you clench up at every little bit of turbulence, you have very little faith you're going to make it through the flight. But, that 747 is a reliable object of faith - it can fly. So even though you had very little faith, it isn't your faith that makes you fly, the plane does. Your faith just gets you on the plane.

If the object of your faith can save you, you are saved. If not, you are not, even if your faith is strong.

Faith in Jesus, whether it's weak or strong, gets you in Christ. And though you have your fears and doubts and sins, Christ is strong. It's the faithfulness of Jesus that saves you, not the perfection of your faith.

Faith isn't the good part we do to contribute to our salvation - nothing in us can save us or rescue us. Faith is the empty hand that receives Jesus.

2. Saving Faith isn't a work or a virtue

Faith isn't a thing we do or a feeling we have to work up. It is an empty hand that receives something, it isn't that something.

If you're exercising and it isn't making any difference: you aren't running farther, you aren't lifting more weight, we would tell you to work harder. That's how we treat work.

But we can't really tell you to believe harder. Because believing isn't a work or a virtue. It is coming to Christ empty, but making Him the one your faith receives.

So saving faith has to have the right object, it has to be in Jesus, but it shouldn't be confused with something we do or earn, it isn't a work or a virtue. What is it?

3. Saving Faith is Knowledge + Assent + Trust

Faith is like a three legged-stool that has to have all three of these legs.

A. Knowledge

Because faith is only good if it is in Jesus, you have to have knowledge of Jesus. You have to have knowledge that we are sinful, knowledge that He is

loving, knowledge that He died, knowledge that He rose. You have to know the story. Not all of it, in fact not very much of it, but enough to open the empty hand of faith to it.

And this is why faith isn't opposed to facts. Sometimes we think that if we are learning things about Jesus, or studying doctrine, or reading history or apologetics, that we will be so full of facts that there won't be any room for faith.

But faith doesn't operate where there are no facts, faith is IN the facts, it opens its hand to the facts. The reason our faith opens up to Jesus is because of the facts of who He is.

And a big part of strengthening faith IS learning facts.

If a person is about to go in for heart surgery⁹, and he is nervous and you go in to sit with him, if you say "just have faith", that probably won't calm his nerves. But if you pull up the doctor's reviews online, and show that he has done this surgery thousands of times, that the outcomes are almost always positive - 1950 out of 2000 have turned out perfectly. That can actually calm the patient down and build faith. Because you're showing that this doctor is someone he can believe in. You don't tell him to just close his eyes and keep repeating "I believe." You are giving him something to believe in.

And we spend a lot of time teaching about Jesus, teaching the facts, we even want our songs to teach like the Bible says they should¹⁰, because the more we perceive the reliability of Jesus, the more we trust in Him.

You see this in the beginning of Luke's gospel. Luke is writing to someone named Theophilus and he says:

⁹ This is modified from a similar illustration in: Horton, Michael. Core Christianity: Finding Yourself in God's Story (p. 15). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

Luke 1:3-4 "3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."

Faith, "certainty", is built by giving an orderly account of the facts about Jesus.

Christianity is built not on feelings, but on historical facts: Christ came, lived perfectly, taught perfectly, died on the cross in history, was buried, and rose again. These are events that happened, and that's where we place our faith.

So while Bill Mahr is right that if you wiped out all of human knowledge we wouldn't be able to reconstruct Christianity again, the same is true of much of our history. We'd never again know about Abraham Lincoln or Julius Caesar - but that doesn't mean they weren't real.

And God has made himself known in Christ in history. And it is those historical realities that we anchor our faith in.

Faith isn't grown by working directly on faith: just believe more, believe harder, make your faith bigger. Faith doesn't work on itself directly. We don't have faith in our faith. We have faith in Jesus.

Faith comes by looking outside ourselves. **"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)**

We can agonize about our faith wondering if I have it - like its a thing or a substance. When it isn't.

You are actually the least aware of your faith when you have the most of it, because then you're just very aware of God's faithfulness.

Faith doesn't gaze in a mirror, it gazes at Christ. And theology, bible study, reading about Christ, singing rich songs about Christ, all serve to build the knowledge component of faith.

So faith is the empty hand that opens to the knowledge of Christ. Faith includes knowledge.

But also

B. Assent

You need to not only know some facts about Christ, but agree with them. People can know Christianity inside and out, but disagree that the story is true and the facts are real. You can have really good theology even if you're not a Christian. Because saving faith isn't just knowledge, but it is also assent - agreeing with what you know.

But even that - knowing Christ is real, and agreeing with the claims of Christianity, isn't saving faith.

So far you have heard the doctor describe your condition and what will cure it, you agree that the cure he prescribed will work, but you still need to take the medicine.

And that's the third leg of the stool:

C. Trust

Knowing about Christ, agreeing with the Gospel message, and now relying on Christ and his mercy for our righteousness. Hanging our hopes on it. Trusting in him, not just knowing about Him, not just agreeing that He is the one, but trusting in Him.

So we learn that Jesus is trustworthy, we agree that He is trustworthy, and then we trust him. And that's faith.

So faith isn't something we do, it is the response of the heart to the perceived faithfulness of God.

We see Jesus as reliable to save us because he rose again, because he has always been faithful to his promises, and we hop on, and true to form, he saves us. (Even though we were nervous about the whole thing.) He's the 747, and we can't fly but we can just sit there and sweat it out in our seats while He does the flying for us.

So it's knowledge, assent, and trust.

But just in case there's any room in your mind to think my faith is something I did and can take credit for, the scriptures make clear that even faith, even having an open hand to Christ, is a gift of God.

We know because God sent a preacher with his word. We agree because God opened our eyes to the beauty and truth of it. We trust because God moved the empty hand of faith toward Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Philippians 1:29 "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake..."

It's all a gift so we can never say that somebody was smart enough to believe in Jesus. It isn't a virtue of ours at all. Faith is not our contribution¹¹, it is a gift of God.

And it's also not something that starts us and then we move on. We live by it.

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in verse 17 ***"The righteous shall live by faith."***

In context, Habakkuk is looking at a messed up world and how wicked the people of Israel had become. And God tells him that His plan is to send the more wicked Assyrians to judge them. God didn't say, "Work up your faith enough and you can change this world." He is told that the righteous live in the midst of a broken world by faith.

They know God is good, after all He had rescued them from Egypt. They know He has a plan for them because He wouldn't start something He didn't finish. They know He'll sort it all out in the end. They know He has always kept every promise, and because God is reliable they have faith in Him.

And this verse then becomes the theme of Romans - the righteous will live by faith.

We live by faith. So all of life is an application of this, there's not a square inch of life that isn't affected by faith in Christ. There is no place this doesn't apply.

But there is one big application I'd like to make of this today. There are a couple of ways we can live contrary to this faith, to what God called Habakkuk to in a broken world.

¹¹ Horton, Michael S.. Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World (p. 39). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

One comes when we look at our own brokenness, and the other comes when we look at the world's brokenness.

We are all conscious, I hope, of the ways we fall short of the righteousness of God. We make some progress in this life, but it's slow and not as big as we had hoped it would be when it comes to our own growth in practical holiness and transformation.

And there's a temptation to live not by faith but by works, and spend our time and energy working to perfect ourselves or do all kinds of religious duties enough to feel OK. I need to do more to believe that I'm a Christian, or to believe that I'm a good one, or to believe that I'm loved by God.

It's a very internally focused, navel-gazing way to live, similar to Luther before his breakthrough.

But the righteous live by faith.

The Christian life is not exhausting ourselves and being perfectionists so we can believe we are OK, but it is trusting in the righteousness of God that is given to us in the Gospel.

It certainly isn't trying to do a bunch of religious works throughout our lives to feel like we are good enough Christians because we give God our works. It is trusting His righteousness.

And this can be incredibly freeing, because now instead of trying to do all kinds of religious works to give to God, we can be freed up to spend our efforts giving our good works to our neighbors.

Luther said, "*God does not need our good works; our neighbor does.*"¹²

Calvin wrote, "*Since our good deeds cannot reach God anyway, he gives us instead other believers unto whom we can do good deeds.*"¹³

So here's some good news for people working so hard to be holy by your own efforts and to receive God's approval and blessings: you can stop trying to pedal faster and by faith just rest in God's arms of grace.

If you keep looking to your own perfect obedience to be able to rest, rejoice, or have confidence that God is with you, you'll never do enough. Your righteousness will never get you there. So when you tremble before God's righteousness as you should, look to Christ. Look to his obedience on your behalf. Look to God's righteousness as something He achieved for you. Look to his promises and his faithfulness to them. Stop looking at yourself - whether its looking at your faith or your works. Look to the one who worked for you, who rescued you, who gave you Himself.

God already has all the perfect obedience he requires of us, that debt was already paid by Jesus.

Don't trust yourself at all - if you trust in yourself to get you even 10% of the way to his approval you'll miss it altogether.

And free from all your religious doing, you can be freed up as you realize God already has everything he requires of you, but your neighbor has an awful lot of needs you can imperfectly meet.

If you cling to Jesus with your empty hand and get your rightness with God only from Him, you can be freed up to serve others without trying to notch your belt or earn points or scamper your way up to God.

¹² Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (trans. Carl C. Rasmussen; Evansville, IN: Ballast, 1994), 10.

¹³ Herman Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms*, 235.

And then, avoid the mirror temptation of assuming my good works are going to bring about a perfect world. We love our neighbors, bring them the gospel, do good, stand with the oppressed, do justice - even if it looks like the whole world is going downhill.

We don't have to lose sleep over the fact that we haven't changed the world or the church hasn't changed the world. We don't have to be among the critics who say "we do this good thing, but what about that other thing that is undone!" (always dissatisfied.) We can be content to offer some good, recognize our limitations, love well, not because we're going to look around and see how the world changed. Habakkuk was told, "It's gonna get worse - but the righteous live by faith."

Rest in Christ and be free.

James Proctor wrote a hymn called "It is Finished" in the late 1800s.

*Nothing, either great or small—Nothing, sinner, no;
Jesus died and paid it all, Long, long ago.*

*"It is finished!" yes, indeed, Finished, ev'ry jot;
Sinner, this is all you need, Tell me, is it not?*

*When He, from His lofty throne, Stooped to do and die,
Ev'rything was fully done; Hearken to His cry!*

*Weary, working, burdened one, Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing; all was done Long, long ago.*

*Till to Jesus' work you cling By a simple faith,
"Doing" is a deadly thing—"Doing" ends in death.*

*Cast your deadly "doing" down—Down at Jesus' feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone, Gloriously complete.*¹⁴

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Questions for Small Group Discussion

(some questions adapted from John Stott's The Message of Romans.¹⁵)

1. Why might we expect Paul to have been ashamed to preach the Gospel in Rome especially? What was it that overcame those factors? How can this help us?
 2. Are you at all ashamed of the Gospel? What is the antidote to this?
 3. What is the righteousness of God?
 4. What does it mean that faith is not a virtue?
 5. How can "doing" be "deadly"?
 6. Discuss the quote from Luther: "*God does not need our good works; our neighbor does.*"
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¹⁴ James Proctor, Scottish Hymnwriter. *It is Finished*.

¹⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994)

Bulletin Notes

Romans 1:16-17

Faith

- I. The temptation to be ashamed (Romans 1:16)
- II. The antidote to being ashamed : power (Romans 1:16)
- III. The source of the power : The righteousness of God (Romans 1:16)
- IV. Receiving the power : By Faith (Romans 1:17)