



**Romans 1:16-17**  
**The Power of the Gospel**

**Summary:** People need to be saved; that's nothing to be ashamed of.

I begin this morning by asking a question: do you think people need to be saved? Do you think the gospel is relevant for everyone or are some people doing alright on their own? Do the leaders of this nation need to be saved? Does Donald Trump need to be saved? Does Joe Biden? The Speaker of the House? The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court? Does the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff need to be saved?

Let's shift our thinking to the world of sports and entertainment – does Taylor Swift need to be saved? Joe Rogan? LeBron James, Roger Federer, Simone Biles, Tom Brady – do they need to be saved?

What about the realm of business and finance – does Elon Musk need to be saved? Jeff Bezos? Warren Buffet?

The answer is yes. Yes, for all of them. God is not impressed by success. They all need to be saved. No amount of professional performance, power, approval, or recognition can be applied to the merit of your eternal soul.

The apostle Paul understood this and that is why he was ready and willing to preach the gospel to the capital city of the Roman empire. It's why, if he were alive today, he would be looking for opportunities to preach the gospel here, in the modern equivalent of Rome.

Read with me in Romans 1, starting in verse 14, Paul says:

**Romans 1:14** I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. **15** So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. **16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. **17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Paul wants to bring a message of salvation to a city that might not seem like it needed it.

I don't expect you to be an expert on ancient Roman culture, I'm not one myself. But you need to know that Rome was once a very powerful, wealthy, and sophisticated city. Not unlike our area today. Roman armies controlled and patrolled the known world in much the same way the American military guarantees freedom of navigation globally today. Roman legions were stationed across southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The Pax Romana or the Peace of Rome was legendary,



no one worried about being attacked or invaded if they lived in an area under Roman control.

Culturally they were sophisticated. They practiced Stoic philosophy and were well-versed in the writings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. They created amazing works of art and architecture – they built things we marvel at today and did it without hydraulic cranes, electricity, or design software. The Romans gave us the mathematics of Pythagoras and the politics of the Senate.



The point is, they were not a people, a culture, or a city that saw themselves in great need. They felt they were doing alright. They were in control and in charge.

And along comes a little half-bald Jewish scholar named Paul, a man whose nation had been conquered by Roman military might and was controlled by Roman political power, and he says a carpenter from northern Israel was the son of God. And that He was arrested, tried, and executed by Roman crucifixion but He rose from the dead and now offers salvation to anyone who will repent and receive it.

For the average Roman the message was incoherent and completely unthinkable, just as it is to some people today. And yet, Paul was ready to preach this message. He wasn't [ashamed](#) of it because he *knew* it was true – it had already changed his life.

I bring all this up because we often miss the inherent resistance to the gospel in the ancient world and then we're surprised and demotivated when we see it in our own.

We see and feel resistance to the gospel today. We know people, love people, who are resistant to the gospel. We know what it means to be [ashamed](#) of what we believe. If you are an honest Christian and you told me you had never once felt a little embarrassed or ashamed, I would be surprised.

What I want you to see however, is that's not new. Paul wouldn't say [I'm not ashamed of the gospel](#) unless there was some reason to assume he would be. He's countering a claim or an assumption here. Paul recognizes a potential for conflict, and he says, I want you to know - I see it, but I don't feel it.

Why? Because he knew the purpose of God, the power of God and the relevance of God. We'll take a look at each of those this morning, but first I want to spend some time thinking about why we might feel ashamed today and whether those feelings are legitimate or not. I've got five things to point out to you about shame.

### **We can be ashamed by expectation.**

The first thing I want to say is, **shame is a function of expectation.** When you feel a sense of a shame, it's because you don't measure up to a standard. The question you have to ask yourself though is, whose standard am I trying to meet?

Personally, I'm not ashamed of my inability to run a sub-four-minute mile. I'm not ashamed of not owning a yacht or a luxury watch. I don't feel those are reasonable expectations of me, so I don't feel any shame whatsoever in not meeting them.

So, here's something worth working through – who and what makes you feel ashamed or embarrassed? Whose expectation are you falling short of? It might be your own or it might be others. But where does the expectation come from, and why does it get to control you? Especially if your identity is rooted and anchored in Jesus. Is the expectation you're ashamed of not meeting legitimate? Is it righteous and helpful?

Because you have to remember something: expectations vary by time and culture.

Ten years ago, the man-bun came on the scene as the cool hair style for men. Then, the mullet made a resurgence from the 90's, especially among baseball players. Today the culture expects cool teenage boys to have a haircut like an alpaca. The point is: expectations change and people go scrambling along after them.



Well, the people of Rome had expectations and there were certainly people who were ashamed of not meeting them. But Paul wasn't one of them. Paul was confident in his own identity. He knew what others expected and it didn't bother him, because he was rooted and anchored in something else.

Now, again, I want to stress, that doesn't mean you won't feel pressure. Paul almost certainly felt the pressure of Roman expectations, values, and norms, but he resisted them firm and confident in the gospel.

Why else might we feel ashamed?

### **We can be ashamed by association.**

Sometimes, we aren't ashamed of who we are, or what we've done, but because of people we're associated with. Someone looks at us and says, *'oh, you're one of them.'*

Friends, this is a plague we cannot escape. People make associations and assumptions all the time – oh, you're an educated black woman. Oh, you're Asian. Oh, you're a white man with a southern accent. You graduated from that school. You like that team. You drive that car. We get lumped in with other people because we share something in common and then we're ashamed, diminished, or dismissed, because of what other people have done or said.

And here's how that plays out today – oh, you're a Christian, does that mean you hate gay people? Does that mean you don't believe in science? Do you think I'm going to hell? Did you vote for Trump?

Being lumped together with others can make for uncomfortable assumptions and associations and leave you feeling a sense of shame or awkwardness. *It's never going away* – you will always be associated with people 'like you' for better or worse. You just have to learn to navigate it. We'll talk more about that in a minute. But first, let's also talk about.

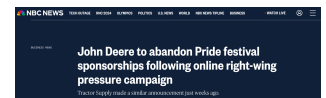
### **Being ashamed by being outdated.**

This really fits with the first point about shame being connected to expectation, but I want to spell it out clearly. For hundreds of years culture reinforced Christian ethics in areas like gender and sexuality. Then, beginning in the 1960s, that started to come apart and now if you want to be cool, and on the 'right side of history,' you have to affirm a sexual ethic that runs counter to what Christians have always believed and taught.

Holding to what Christians have always believed for two thousand years can make you feel uncomfortable when all the cool kids expect you to fly a rainbow flag even higher than the American flag and they intentionally, deliberately, maliciously shame you if you don't.

Ironically, Paul ministered to a culture with a very similar sexual ideology, as we'll see next week, yet he was [unashamed](#) of what he proclaimed. Again, there's no way to completely avoid the shame that comes from believing something that the cool people say is not cool. But perhaps it helps to remember that what the cool people say changes like hairstyles.

And, not everyone agrees with them – one of the big trends right now is companies backing down from all their support of things like Pride month. The public, investors, and consumers have said – not all of us support that, and we're not ashamed to say so.



OK, so far we have looked at sources of shame that we can understand and resist. But there are also sources of shame that we deserve. For example.

### **We can be ashamed by hypocrisy.**

Sometimes, we're ashamed because we deserve it. We let ourselves and others down by our behaviors and actions. We say one thing and do another. This is more than just inability. There's nothing wrong with aiming for something you can't quite reach yet. We're not talking about the person who says I value this, but I can't reach it on my own. The problem is with the person who says I value this, but then doesn't reach for it at all, and in fact, actively reaches in a different direction.

There is such a thing as well-deserved shame. It can be a powerful motivating emotion. There are things we do and don't do that we *should* be ashamed of. And we should *feel* that shame. But instead of driving us to depression or destruction, it should drive us to confession and repentance – which means change.

Regret is not repentance and it won't help you long term with shame. Remorse is not repentance and it will not help you long term with shame. To repent is to change course, to change direction, to say, I was wrong and now I'm moving in the opposite direction. I have changed course. That was a failure, a compromise, it's not who or what I want to be and so I renounce it, I agree – it was unfitting, or unworthy, or flat out wrong – I don't want to do it again, and so I am moving in the opposite direction.

And of course, the best way to do that is by confessing your sin to God, asking for forgiveness, and then asking for divine guidance and strength as you move out in a new direction. Which leads to our fifth point

### **We can be ashamed by truth.**

Now there is some subtlety involved here. I'm not saying this is what *should* happen, I'm saying this *does* happen. Paul is [not ashamed of the gospel](#) – he resists the shame, but he says that because there was an impulse to feel it. There were people in Rome who wanted him to feel it. He resisted and rejected it, but he understood it. He said elsewhere:

[1 Corinthians 1:23 ... we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.](#)

In other words, Paul says I know people don't fully understand or receive my message – it's confusing and silly to some people. Not everyone gets it. But I'm not going to be ashamed of the truth.

Paul was imprisoned in Philippi, run out of town in Thessalonica, smuggled out of Damascus, laughed at in Athens, and the target of more than one assassination attempt in Jerusalem – his message was foolishness to culturally sophisticated Greeks and a stumbling block to religiously fundamentalist Jews.

Scripture says there's a reason for that blindness and confusion and it's anchored more in the spirit and soul than in the mind – in other words, it's not that Paul is not explaining it right or they're not hearing him clearly or correctly, it's that it doesn't make sense to them because they're spiritually blind. They don't yet value spiritual things, or value them in the same way. Paul offers a solution to a problem they don't feel and so they resist him – they call him a fool, a traitor, a bigot, a heretic, a sexist, a misogynist, and all the other names you can think of. They try to shame him.

And so too today, there are people who want you to feel shame because of what you believe, how you live, and Who you follow. The pressure is there, and it is real. Jesus spoke about it this way:

[John 15:18 If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because](#)

you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Christian, there is no avoiding the fact that some people will resist you, call you a fool, paint you as an enemy, hate you, actively resist you, and try to make you feel ashamed, afraid, or foolish for what you believe. *They aren't resisting you.* They aren't rejecting you. They're resisting and rejecting the God whom you serve.

So let me give you two ways to respond.

First, live a counter-example that they cannot ignore. **Live an authentically beautiful life** that is compelling because it's true. Live with integrity. Love your spouse. Spend time with your kids. Work hard and work well. Look like you enjoy your life. Show that a life built on the gospel, guided by Scripture, and empowered by the Spirit is satisfying and enjoyable.

Personally, I'm willing to do a side-by-side comparison with anyone – show me what you've got and I'll show you what I've got. I don't feel like I'm missing anything. I'm content. I have peace in my soul. I have peace in my marriage. I have disappointments and desires, of course, but I'm not ashamed of anything, are you?

So, the first way to counter shame? Live an authentically beautiful life. Second – **agree with correct criticisms** – this helps with shame by association, when people 'like us' do things that are disappointing and wrong, don't deny it or downplay it, agree.

When people express their disappointment with the Church and religious leaders – agree with them if they're right. I'm just as disappointed in pastors and priests who abuse people or chase money or act unethically. That kind of behavior should always be condemned. It's grievous no matter who does it. But *the problem is with the person, not the church.* In fact, *it's the teachings of the church that tell us their behavior is wrong.*

Meanwhile, we find people and leaders in other fields doing the same thing. Politicians are guilty of sexual assault and abuse, financial misconduct, bullying behavior, and greed. And so are leaders in the entertainment industry – whether we're talking about musicians, actors, or producers and directors. Top-level military officers are guilty – we just had a two-star general face a court-martial in the Air Force and guess what, alcohol and sexual misconduct were involved. Sports figures are guilty, both players and coaches.

My point is: yes, it's disappointing when spiritual leaders and churches or ministries don't live up to the values they profess, but the failure is a *human failure* and it's exactly what the teachings of the Church point out as sin, evidence of why we need salvation.

So, here's a principle to use for everyone, everywhere – don't judge the rest of us by the worst of us. Don't judge every white person by what some white person did. Don't judge every immigrant by what one immigrant did. Don't judge the sport of basketball or the NBA by what one player did. And don't judge the teachings of Christ by what one priest or pastor



or even what one whole denomination did. The flaw is in the person, it's not endemic in the group or the system.

OK, so far we've seen why we might feel shame and how to respond to it, it's like we've talked about the car and how to drive it but we haven't put any fuel in the tank. That's what we're going to do next – Paul said:

16 ... I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, **for** it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Paul didn't just say I'm not going to be ashamed. He said I'm **not ashamed** *because* of all these other things. I have all these other reasons. If you're taking notes this morning I've got three sources of power, three-sources of anti-shame fuel that we can find with Paul. First,

### **Know the purpose of God**

Paul says **I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation.** Paul has a message to share: God sent His Son to save us. God knows we are in trouble without Him. We are headed for suffering in eternity. We are racking up fines and punishments as we go through this life and we owe more than we can pay. God knows judgment is coming our way. God knows we have things to actually be ashamed of. And we know it too, our conscience condemns us.

But not only does God know our problem, He has also provided a solution. Friends, don't miss this – God's ultimate purpose is our **salvation**. He wants to help us. To bless us. To renew and restore us. God does not rejoice in our judgment. God is not giddy over our suffering. God does not want to deprive us of satisfaction and enjoyment. The plot line of the Bible is God working to save us. This is His purpose.

Christian, when you feel a twinge of shame or embarrassment, remember the purpose of God – He has saved you and He wants to save others. Even people who seem to have it all together. Even people who seem to have money, and power, and status. Paul was **not ashamed of the gospel** because he knew the people of Rome needed to be saved. And so do the people of DC, and NYC, and LA, and everywhere else. What they have – and let's be clear – they have stuff – but what they have is not enough to solve the problem of their soul. But the gospel can. So, have confidence in the purpose of God. And, in

### **Know the power of God**

The old hymn says

*He breaks the power of conquered sin,*

*He sets the prisoners free.*

Paul knew this in his own life. He experienced a radical conversion. There was a clear before and after. The same thing happens today. When I surrendered my life to Jesus, things changed. Some changed suddenly, some changed slowly, but there was, absolutely, change. The power of God showed up in my life. Remember, the gospel is *news* of what God has done, it's not a set of instructions for what we have to do. When people hear and receive the gospel, when we remind ourselves of the gospel, there is transformative power in the message. God has accomplished something. He did not merely make it *possible*; He has *done it* we simply need to receive it.

Think about it like this – if you only had one hour left to live, what do you think you would need to do in order to face God? What do you think you would need to do to be ready to face eternity? If you really understand the gospel, you know the answer is *nothing* – just repent and believe. As Paul will later write,

**Romans 10:9** if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

In other words, **the just shall live by faith** – faith in the purpose and power of God – believing that we need to be saved. That God's purpose is to save us and He has the power to do it. Christian, when you feel a twinge of shame or embarrassment, remember the life-transforming power of the gospel. That people really do radically change when the gospel impacts their life. Remember the change in your own life.

Or, if you don't have a 'moment in time' kind of salvation, remember the power God has shown time and again in your life by providing for you and directing you. All Christians have seen and experienced the power of God at some point – remember that, and remember that it's greater than the power of the people who might make you feel shame.

Finally,

### **Know the relevance of God**

This message is for everyone. It's for Jews like Paul and people in Rome. It's for you and me, and for Donald Trump and Joe Biden. It's for Taylor Swift and Warren Buffet. There is no one that the gospel is not for. If you value diversity, if you value inclusion, you should value the fact that God loves all people – we all need to be saved, and He is calling us all to be saved.

God is calling Ukrainians and Russians to be saved. God wants Jews and Palestinians to be saved. Democrats and Republicans. Chinese and Taiwanese. I'm almost positive God wants to save people with Androids just as much as those with iPhones.



When you feel ashamed of the gospel – remember, it has been around for two thousand years and has shaped and changed lives around the globe. The gospel is not an invention of Western Civilization or white culture. It sprang out of the Middle East and rushed down into Africa, out across Asia, and yes, up into Europe. Today there are Christians on every continent, in every country. Not because anyone conquered them or controls them. But because God’s purpose found them and His power transformed them. He saved them, and they, we, rejoice over what He has done. We discover this new life by faith, and live it with joy.

Rich people have been saved. Poor people have been saved. Political leaders and celebrities, actors and athletes, scientists and artists. The gospel is for us all – it’s nothing to be ashamed of - [for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...it is the revelation of the righteousness of God.](#)

Speaking of shame, Jesus said:

[Luke 9:26](#) whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father’s, and of the holy angels.

Probably, most of us need to repent this morning. You might need to repent of your shame and embarrassment or you need to repent of your sin. But whichever one it is, the path and the process are still the same. God shows us what we have done wrong, points us to Jesus for forgiveness, and fills us with the Holy Spirit for help and strength.

There is no one in this room who God is not willing to forgive or to help. Jew or Roman, Greek or barbarian, God is reaching out to you, offering to transform and help you. There’s no shame in receiving in that help.

Let’s pray.



## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### Romans 1:16-17 The Power of the Gospel

**Summary:** People need to be saved, that's nothing to be ashamed of.

- Have you ever been ashamed of the gospel or of being known as a Christian? Why?
- Rome was the foremost city of the day, and yet the city still needed Jesus. Who or what is the modern equivalent of Rome – people who might be resistant to the gospel because they seem to have it all?
  - o What factors make us think someone might not be in need of the gospel (they're famous, they have power, they're rich, etc)?
- What does it mean for shame to be a function of expectation? When have you been ashamed of not measuring up? How do you respond to the ever-changing expectations of culture?
- When have you felt ashamed by association – you got lumped in with other people that you didn't necessarily agree with or were not proud of. How do you separate yourself in those situations?
- What is the difference between being ashamed of your own hypocrisy and being ashamed because of your association with Jesus?
  - o When has sticking with Jesus made your life more difficult? When have you been resisted or rejected by others because of some clear Christian teaching, for example teaching on sexual ethics or marriage?
- What does it mean to live an authentically beautiful life? How does satisfaction with your life counter the impulse to feel shame?
- How does condemning the sin of Christians help us resist an impulse to feel shame?
- How does knowing the purpose, power, and relevance of the gospel help you personally love Jesus more and give you confidence instead of shame?
- **How to love Jesus more:** Ask people to share their testimony – how were they saved? How did God accomplish His purpose and display His power and relevance?