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No Shame

Romans 1.16-17

Series: The Pure Gospel

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I. Introduction

- A. I remember the heady days in the 1970's
 - 1. You remember the 70's, don't you?
 - 2. They followed the 60's
 - 3. And you certainly remembered what the 60's were about
 - a. One of the most significant times of social transformation this nation has ever seen
 - b. The sexual revolution, generated by the invention of the birth control pill, fueled by growing pressure for abortion on demand
 - c. The Vietnam war, the unrest on college campuses with all the protests
 - d. The burgeoning drug culture, with Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary calling young people to turn on, tune in, and drop out in his advocacy of hallucinogenic drugs
 - 4. Well, I was just a young lad during the 60's; probably missed a good bit of it
 - a. But the 70's were the 60's part 2 in many respects
 - b. And when I was in college I found myself in the midst of all the same issues, rehashed and reformulated
 - c. And dormitories and campus apartments were the sites of endless late-night discussions
 - d. In which students, when they were sober enough to have those conversations, proclaimed themselves philosophers du jour
 - e. Knowing more than their ignorant parents, they expostulated on politics, religion, philosophy, and culture like they'd been studying the subjects for centuries!
 - f. Our generation was going to change the world!
 - 5. I took part in those discussions
 - a. And I noticed something about them that, years later, that would help me to make sense of how our social system operates
 - b. If I were, for example, to make a statement – a propositional claim – a statement that purported to establish some truthful observation...
 - c. Inevitably, somebody would say, “Well, that’s just your opinion.”
 - 6. Well, of course it was my opinion

- a. I never intended to pretend that it was someone else's opinion
 - b. I owned it; indeed, I believed it
 - c. I believed it to be true
7. But as time went on it struck me what was happening during those discussions when someone said, "Well, that's just your opinion"
- a. What happened was, they changed the subject
 - b. And my opinion was simply dismissed; relegated to the ash heap of history; never discussed or even taken seriously
 - c. In other words, I was silenced
 - d. They might as well have said, "Hawkins, shut up!"
 - e. "We don't want to hear your dumb ideas"
 - f. "Stifle yourself" (Archie Bunker fans; a 70's reference)
- B. I actually thought about this a couple of decades later
- 1. When I was a university professor
 - a. I had taken a sabbatical and used it to study the philosophical discipline of epistemology – the study of knowledge; how we know; how we think we know anything
 - b. You might wonder why someone like me, teaching in a College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences, would dive into that rather pedantic world
 - 2. It was because I was troubled
 - a. There was a sea change in the philosophical world – not unrelated, by the way, to the social changes in the 60's and 70's
 - b. In which philosophical relativism was dominating the academic world, especially in the humanities, the arts, and in my area – education
 - c. Specifically, the movement which began to dominate education was neo-Marxism
 - d. Which was fundamentally a relativistic enterprise
 - 3. And I wanted to do something about it
 - a. And cared about my discipline; I didn't want the notion of truth to be cast aside
 - b. I didn't want knowledge to be relativized
 - c. I didn't want the destructive effects of philosophical relativism to wreak havoc on the academic world
 - 4. I lost
 - a. We lost that battle
 - b. Sadly
 - c. For the academic orthodoxy today is that there is no such thing as truth
 - d. Each person has their own truth
 - e. And you're supposed to respect each person's notion of truth
 - f. Except yours

- C. But I actually wrote some academic papers trying to present alternative approaches to epistemology which were based on the presupposition that there is such a thing as truth
1. And truth that can be known
 - a. Not perfectly
 - b. But substantially
 2. And one of the points that I made at that time is that the relativistic versions of knowledge is the sophisticated, higher-education version of the rather sophomoric “Well, that’s just your opinion”
 3. And what that approach does is that it silences anyone who claims that there is such a thing as truth
 - a. Truth that is true, regardless of whether I believe it or not
 - b. Schaeffer – “true truth”
 4. This kind of philosophical relativism is the sophisticated higher education version of “Just shut up”
- D. Well, times have changed; relativism has blossomed; it dominates, not just the academic world, but indeed – everyday life
1. And if you have a truth claim to make, the world says, you should just “Shut up!”
 - a. “That’s just your opinion”
 - b. And you’re silenced
 2. And the way it happens now is by **Shaming**
 3. The world has developed a new vocabulary of shaming people into submission
 - a. If you question contemporary sexual mores, you are labeled puritanical, or worse – homophobic
 - b. If you question the radical environmental science that supposedly underlies catastrophic anthropogenic global warming, you are a denier – like a holocaust denier
 - c. And of course – everyone is racist
 - d. So the world has labels for pretty much everyone who does not toe the line and subscribe to the narrative the secular relativistic world insists you must obey
 4. So – shame on you!
 - a. Just be quiet
 - b. Stifle yourself
- E. As much as we’d like to think this was a 20th or 21st Century phenomenon, this is the way it’s pretty much always been
1. It was in Paul’s day
 2. In the Greco-Roman world in which Paul lived, there was a vibrant culture of shame
 3. The sophisticated pagan philosophers, looked down their noses at those ignorant monotheists like the Jews and the Christians, that upstart Jewish sect which claimed some guy had risen from the dead
 - a. “Christians” was, from its inception, an epithet, a putdown

- b. A label designed to suppress speech and influence
 - 4. And the notion that this nascent religion had anything to offer was dismissed out of hand
 - a. It was the object of sneers and hate-filled diatribes
 - b. It was what all the jokes were about on late-night television
 - c. Ok, there wasn't late-night television in those days – but if there were, that's what would have dominated the programming
 - d. "Guess what those idiot Christians are up to this time!"
 - F. And the notion that this religion claimed to have good news!
 - 1. That was outrageous!
 - 2. The idea, that through this guy, raised from the dead
 - a. Had made it possible to be saved from sin
 - b. Radically changed, set apart for godliness
 - c. Given hope for an eternity of glory
 - 3. Preposterous!
 - G. But Paul says, "Enough!"
 - 1. "You can call me anything you want"
 - 2. "You can try to shut me down, silence me"
 - 3. "But I will not be shamed; I will not be silenced"
 - H. "I am not ashamed of the gospel"

II. The Most Important Words

- A. **Romans 1:16–17** (ESV) —
 - 1. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
 - 2. for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,
 - 3. to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
 - 4. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,
 - 5. as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."
- B. These two verses, are by some accounts, the most important words in the NT
 - 1. Certainly important for our study of Romans
 - 2. Key verse – thematic verse
 - a. Expresses what the book is about
 - b. **The Gospel**
 - 3. Paul has already introduced the gospel
 - a. 1.1 – Paul is set apart for the gospel of God
 - b. 1.9 – Paul serves God in the gospel of His Son
 - c. 1.15 – eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome
 - 4. Now he declares that he's not ashamed of it
 - a. Didn't think he was – mentioned it three times already!
 - 5. But he does more than that in these verses
 - a. He tells us why he's not ashamed
 - b. That's what makes it a key verse
 - c. Foreshadows so much of the rest of Romans
- C. Key verses are important in the study of any book
 - 1. Most books have them

- a. Provide important clues to what the book is about
 - b. Provides a check on aberrant interpretations if we remember what the book is supposed to be about
- 2. It's importance surpasses its value for interpreting Romans
 - a. Whole NT is about the gospel
 - b. Romans is the most systematic exposition of it
 - c. Arguably, Romans 1.16-17 may be the most important thematic verse for the whole NT
- D. Location of these verse in relation to the book as a whole is interesting
 - 1. Main issue of the gospel is introduced in vv 16-17
 - a. But Paul doesn't begin to exposit them, or to describe the essence of the gospel beginning in v 18
 - 2. Recognize that by comparing it to **Romans 3.21-22**
 - a. They say pretty much the same thing
 - 3. Romans 1.17 – the righteousness of God is revealed
 - a. Romans 3.21 – the righteousness of God has been manifested
 - 4. Romans 1.17 – as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith (quoting Habakkuk)
 - a. Romans 3.21 – being witnessed by the Law and the prophets
 - 5. Romans 1.17 – the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith
 - a. Romans 3.22 – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ
 - 6. Romans 1.16 – salvation to everyone who believes
 - a. Romans 3.22 – for all those who believe
 - 7. Romans 1.16 – to the Jew first and also to the Greek
 - a. Romans 3.22 – for there is no distinction
 - 8. Two sets of key verses – 1.16-17 and 3.21-22
 - a. Say exactly the same things
 - b. Romans 3.21-22 begin the exposition of the gospel
- E. Well, what then is Paul doing between Romans 1.13-3.20
 - 1. Before describing that the gospel is all about, he is laying the foundation for his argument
 - a. The desperate need for humanity to listen to the gospel
 - b. Gospel is good news
 - c. But people are less interested in good news if they don't understand that they are the bad news!
- F. The main difference between Romans 1.16-17 and Romans 3.21-22 is that in 1.16-17 Paul declares that he is not ashamed of the gospel
 - 1. Need to find out why he's not ashamed
 - 2. Paul lays down at least six reasons why he's not ashamed
 - a. Makes these verses, not only the most important verse in the NT
 - b. But also two of the riches verses!

III. **Why is Paul Not Ashamed**

A. **The Gospel is Good News**

1. Already examined this issue
 - a. **Euaggelion (Gk) – good message**
 - b. People ought to be glad to receive it
2. Not everyone seems to receive it this way
 - a. Gospel, properly understood, is always good news
 - b. But the idea of God is not always good news
 - c. All depends on the relationship we have with God
3. Example – Martin Luther
 - a. Early on he took “the righteousness of God” in v 17 as the righteousness whereby God Himself is righteous
 - b. And in God’s righteousness, it is the basis for God justly punishing sinners
 - c. Couldn’t for the life of him see that this was good news; he knew he was a sinner
 - d. Led to a different outlook
 - e. Luther: I had no love for that holy and just God who punishes sinners. I was filled with secret anger against Him.
4. Led Luther to a lifestyle of extreme piety as he tried desperately to earn enough righteousness to be saved
 - a. Luther: I was indeed a pious monk and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. Of this all the friars who have known me can testify. If it had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortification even to death, by means of my watchings, prayers, reading and other labors.
5. Luther became increasingly depressed, convinced more and more of the impossibility of ever pleasing this righteous God
 - a. Took his spiritual mentor, Johann Staupitz, to try to encourage him, to tell him that the gospel is good news
 - b. Staupitz: More than a thousand times have I sworn to our holy God to live piously, and I have never kept my vows. Now I swear no longer, for I know that I cannot keep my solemn promises. If God will not be merciful towards me for the love of Christ and grant me a happy departure when I must quit this world, I shall never with the aid of all my vows and all my good works stand before Him. I must perish.
 - c. Staupitz: Why do you torment yourself with all these speculations and these high thoughts?... Look at the wounds of Jesus Christ, to the blood that he has shed for your; it is there that the grace of God will appear to you. Instead of torturing yourself on account of your sins, throw yourself into the Redeemer’s arms. Trust in him – in the righteousness of his life – in the atonement of his death. Do not shrink back. God is not angry with you; it is you who are angry with God. Listen to the Son of God.

6. Luther still had a hard time with the whole idea, but the seed was planted
 - a. Somewhere in the gospel was good news
 - b. Luther asked Staupitz how he could be so sure
 - c. Staupitz told him to look to the Scriptures
 7. The gospel is good news
 - a. Once it is rightly understood
 - b. Our predicament is clear
 - c. The gospel should be received with gladness by every sinner
 - d. Nothing about it for which we should be ashamed
 8. And we will see in a few moments what it was that changed Luther's perspective
- B. **The Gospel is Powerful**
1. Incredibly important concept for us to receive
 2. Contemporary American Christianity is forever trying to find ways of making the gospel more palatable
 - a. Wrapping it in the garb of the world
 - b. Appealing to all kinds of felt needs
 - c. Seeking ways of presenting the gospel in ways that don't offend people
 3. Remember a gentleman making a presentation some years ago on his ministry to AIDS sufferers
 - a. Talked about how he shared the gospel
 - b. He said when he got to the part about our being sinner, he said he usually got an adverse reaction
 - c. So he was quick to point out to the listener that that just meant nobody's perfect
 - d. Then the listener would be willing to continue the conversation
 4. But being a sinner means a lot more than "nobody's perfect"
 - a. It means we are in active rebellion against the holiness of God Himself
 - b. It means we suppress the truth about God, deny either His existence or the implications of His existence
 - c. We are cosmic traitors against the government of the universe
 - d. And unless we repent, we are destined for an eternity of just destruction
 - e. But that, of course, would be too offensive
 5. What happens is, Christianity tries all kinds of ways to make the gospel more appealing, by adding to the gospel, or by subtracting from it.
 6. Main issue – gospel itself is powerful
 - a. It's power is self-contained
 - b. Don't need to add any of our own power
 - c. Don't need to be afraid we'll leave something out
 - d. Don't need to be concerned we'll present improperly
 - e. If it's genuinely the gospel, it will be transforming

7. Lloyd-Jones: The thing to grasp is that the apostle is saying that he is not ashamed of the gospel, because it is of God's mighty working. It is God himself doing this thing – not simply telling us about it: doing it, and doing it in this way, through the gospel.
 8. Boice: (speaking of the foolishness of preaching): ... what every preacher feels at one time or another as he rises to proclaim a message that to the natural mind is utter folly and that is as incapable of doing good in the hearers as preaching a message of moral reformation to the corpses in a cemetery – *unless* God works.
 9. The gospel is powerful!
- C. **The Gospel is Unto Salvation**
1. **Romans 1:16** (ESV) — 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation...
 2. That's what the gospel is for, after all – salvation
 3. But saved from what
 - a. Listen to a lot of contemporary preaching
 - b. Poor self esteem
 - c. Meaninglessness
 - d. Loneliness
 - e. Poverty
 4. NT only says we are saved from two things: wrath and sin
 - a. Wrath of God is certainly downplayed these days
 - b. With good reason – hard to think for even 5 minutes about the wrath of God
 - c. Descriptions
 - (1) Outer darkness
 - (2) Weeping and gnashing of teeth
 - (3) Eternal destruction
 - (4) Unquenchable fire
 - d. Those are just figurative, metaphors!
 - e. But the reality is likely worse than the metaphors!
 5. Easy to see why people fear wrath
 - a. We try to make it easier to take
 - (1) “Eternity without God”
 - (2) “Christless eternity”
 - b. I believe neither of those statements are true
 - c. **Revelation 14:9–11** (ESV) — 9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 **he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.** 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these

worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

- d. God is right there in His wrath; so is the Lamb, Christ!
 - e. Everyone in hell experiences them both – in their wrath!
 6. They also experience other dimensions of God’s character as well – love and mercy and grace
 - a. As they are able to observe the bliss and love enjoyed by those who have genuinely repented and are saved
 - b. Illustrated by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus
 - c. Contrast between the lost and the saved is stark, and is not lost on those who reject the gospel!
 7. Even more important to be saved from sin
 - a. Irony – we are more afraid of wrath than we are of sinning
 - b. Ought to be the other way around
 - c. The reason there is wrath is because of sin
 - d. Shouldn’t we be more afraid of the cause of the problem rather than the effect?
 - e. That just shows how upside down is our perspective
 8. Bottom line
 - a. Gospel is the power of God for salvation
 - b. From wrath and sin
 - c. Nothing more important than that
 9. Gospel is the only thing that really matters for eternity
 - a. World is in an uproar over all kinds of oppressions and fears
 - b. Not in an uproar over the impending wrath of God and of the sin that causes it
- D. **The Gospel is for *Everyone* who Believes**
1. The gospel is not restricted to any one group of people
 - a. Certainly not to Jews as opposed to Gentiles or Greeks
 - b. **Romans 1:16** (ESV) — 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.
 - c. **Romans 3:22** (ESV) — 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction...
 2. We live in a divided age
 - a. We all know that – but today the division is purposeful
 - b. You are supposed to be identified by your group – gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status
 - c. Wretched humans that we are! Who will deliver us from these intractable divisions?
 - d. Only the gospel!
 - e. The gospel is for everyone – regardless of language, tribe, nation, ethnicity, race, gender
 - f. Even for every kind of sinner!
 3. The preacher has no fear that the gospel doesn’t apply to someone!

4. Boice: (speaking of the gospel being for everybody): Why? Because it is the power of God, and God is no respecter of persons. If the gospel were of human power only, it would be limited by human interests and abilities. It would be for some and not others. It would be for the strong but not for the weak, or the weak but not for the strong. It would be for the intelligent but not the foolish, or the foolish but not the wise. It would be for the noble or the well-bred or the sensitive or the poor or the rich or whatever, to the exclusion of those who do not fit the categories. But this is not the way it is. The gospel is for everyone.
5. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way out of morass of our societal dysfunction and distress

E. **The Gospel is Applied by Faith**

1. **Romans 1:16** (ESV) — 16 ... it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
2. **Romans 1:17** (ESV) — 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”
3. Faith is the critically important feature of the gospel, the means by which we are able to appropriate it
 - a. Without faith it would be by works; no good news
4. That was the issue for Martin Luther
 - a. Made a pilgrimage to Rome
 - b. Went there to engage with other pilgrims in visiting various shrines and see the relics
 - c. Wanted to engage in various rituals to earn merit and reduce his time in purgatory
 - d. But he was shocked by the decadence and sinful corruption within the church that he found there
5. One incident at the Church of St. John Lateran
 - a. Pilates’ Stairs
 - b. Supposedly the very stairs leading up to Pilate’s house in Jerusalem
 - c. Complete with the stains of the blood of Christ
 - d. Called Holy Stairs
 - e. One would ascend on his knees – praying, kissing each step
6. Described by Dr. Paul Luther (Luther’s son)
 - a. Luther began as others had. But, as he ascended the staircase, the words of our text came forcefully to his mind: “The just shall live by faith.”
 - b. They seemed to echo over and over again, growing louder with each repetition: “The just shall live by faith,” “The just shall live by faith.” But Luther was not living by faith. He was living by fear. The old superstitious doctrines and the new biblical theology wrestled within him.
 - c. “By fear,” said Luther
 - d. “By faith,” said St. Paul

- e. “By fear,” said Luther
 - f. “By faith,” said the scriptures
 - g. “By fear,” said those who agonized beside him on the staircase
 - h. “By faith!” said God the Father
 - i. At last Luther rose in amazement from the steps up which he had been dragging himself and shuddered at his superstition and follow. Now he realized that God had saved him by the righteousness of Christ, received by faith; he was to exercise that faith, receive that righteousness, and live by trusting God. He had not been doing it.
 - j. Slowly he turned on Pilate’s staircase and returned to the bottom. He went back to Wittenberg, and in time... “He took ‘The just shall live by faith’ as the foundation of all his doctrine.”
7. That’s how crucial faith is
- a. Spurgeon: Faith is not a blind thing; for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing; for faith believes facts of which it is sure. It is not an unpractical, dreamy thing; for faith trusts, and stakes its destiny upon the truth of revelation.... Faith ... is the eye which looks.... Faith is the hand which grasps... Faith is the mouth which feeds upon Christ.
 - b. Luther learned that – the hard way perhaps
 - c. Paul knew that; that’s why he was not ashamed!
8. Have you learned to live by faith in the risen Son of God?
- F. **The Gospel Reveals God’s Righteousness**
- 1. **Romans 1:17** (ESV) — 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed...
 - 2. This is the part that troubled Luther so much
 - a. Eventually he began to see that it was God’s righteousness in Christ
 - b. A righteousness that we so desperately need
 - c. A righteousness that God gives to us as we believe in Him!
 - 3. **Romans 3:21–22** (ESV) — 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. ...
 - 4. In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed
 - a. But remember, the gospel concerns Christ
 - b. It’s His righteousness
 - c. We need it
 - d. He gives it
 - 5. He transfers the righteousness of Christ into our account
 - a. The Bible calls it imputation
 - b. Bookkeeping term
 - c. Boice: (speaking of imputation): It is like putting the infinite moral capital of the Lord Jesus Christ in our empty bank account.
 - 6. Once Luther discovered that, his life turned from depression to joy

- a. Gospel became good news!
- b. It was always good news – but now good news for him!
- 7. Both Paul and Luther learned the hard way that our own righteousness can't cut it
- 8. **Philippians 3:1–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.
 - b. ... 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:
 - c. 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;
 - d. 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
 - e. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
 - f. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
 - g. 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—
 - h. 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
- 9. That's why Paul was not ashamed
 - a. That's why Luther was not ashamed
 - b. That's why we should not be either

IV. **Are You Ashamed of the Gospel?**