

UNASHAMED!
The Gospel's Power to Banish Guilt and Shame

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 1:16-17

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

Introduction:

- The two verses before us are the most significant in the entire book of Romans. If Romans is the Mount Everest of the Bible, these verses reveal what Paul wants us to see when we reach the top.
- They are one of four key passages Paul wrote to explain the gospel through which God saves the world for His glory through Christ!

Four key passages in the New Testament serve as foundational texts for our understanding of the gospel. All four address essential "first-order" truths that are critical to the gospel. They are so important that Paul urged the Corinthians to hold fast to these basic truths, emphasizing that their salvation depended on doing so (1 Cor. 15:1-2). In other words, we must understand, firmly grasp, and continually believe the truths presented in all four of these passages.

1. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 –Paul presents the **historical reality** of the events central to the gospel (i.e., the death and burial of Jesus Christ – according to the Scriptures; resurrection on the third day – according to the Scriptures).
2. Romans 1:3-4 – Paul reveals the **central figure** who accomplishes the glorious work of the gospel (the essence and cosmic impact of the gospel) by being

born into the realm of sin and shame, defeating Satan, overcoming sin, and conquering death. Then, at His resurrection, He inaugurated a new kingdom age marked by life, grace, power, and glory, over which He rules as Lord and Savior of all who have been granted access by faith into this new kingdom age.

3. **Romans 1:16-17** – Paul emphasizes the ***gospel's power to defeat Satan, overcome sin, and conquer death in our lives!*** These verses illustrate how the gospel works in our lives, showcasing God's ability to rescue us from sin and remove shame and guilt by granting us an unimpeachable righteous standing before Him. (The gospel from our vantage point.)
 4. Romans 3:23-26 – Paul reveals ***how a righteous God granted sinners a righteous standing*** righteously through the vicarious atonement Christ made on the cross. (The gospel from God's vantage point.)
- ***These two verses are significant because they demonstrate God's power through the gospel to rescue us from sin, remove our guilt, and transform our shame into glory and honor in His sight!***
 - Which is why you and I must never be ashamed of this gospel! We must own it joyfully. We must live it openly. And we must share it boldly with others! We can't afford to live our lives ashamed of the very thing that gave us life – the gospel of Jesus!
 - This is what Paul meant when he wrote these verses – *"Roman Christians, I can't wait to come to you! And when I get there I want to preach the gospel again to you and I want to proclaim it throughout all Rome – because I am not ashamed of the gospel by which God saved me and which I have been entrusted to deliver to others!"*
 - When we really grasp these verses, we begin to understand why Paul was so eager to come to Rome to preach this gospel to the Roman believers! ***Why? Because the gospel is for sharing!***
 - Paul was eager to come to Rome to share this gospel because the gospel holds something so remarkable that it changes everything once you see and experience it for yourself.

- And the way we are going to really see this stunning thing that transformed Paul's life and transfixed his heart is to ask him to answer five questions about these two verses:
 1. *Why isn't the gospel a cause for shame?*
 2. *What is in the gospel that removes guilt and banishes shame?*
 3. *How does a person obtain this life-transforming benefit for themselves?*
 4. *How does God do this through something so simple as the gospel?*
 5. *How can I be sure this is true and has truly happened to me?*

*I want to look at Paul's answers to the first three questions this morning. We will save Paul's answers to the **last two questions for next Sunday because they are profoundly significant in shaping who we are, what we believe, and how we live our lives for Christ.***

- We need to listen carefully to Paul's answers this morning because they resolve two of the most important issues we face in our lives as Christians – guilt and shame.
- At some point all of us have felt the crushing weight of guilt or experienced the despair that comes from deep shame we can't seem to overcome in the eyes of others or even in our own eyes.
- Put differently, no matter how hard we try, we can never lift the weight of guilt from off our soul. No matter how far we run, we never seem to be able to outrun our shame. And if we don't find a way to deal with guilt and shame, they will ruin our relationships, rob our joy, and destroy our lives!
- BUT from the top of Mount Everest, Paul points to an amazing, joy-producing, soul-strengthening sight – somehow in the gospel God has found a way to remove our guilt and banish our shame! And He puts that amazing truth into these two verses that serve as the foundation for the rest of Romans! **So let's begin by asking Paul to explain something he says in 1:16.**

I. Why isn't the gospel a cause for shame?

For I am not ashamed of the gospel.

- This may sound like a strange question to our ears this morning. We love the gospel! We cherish its truth! We share its story! We are incredibly thankful for what Jesus did for us through the gospel—we would never, ever turn away from the gospel out of shame, not in a million years! ***So why would Paul need to tell the Roman Christians that he was not ashamed of the gospel?***
- To understand what Paul is getting at, we need to confront two questions: (1) What did shame look like and feel like in Paul's world? and (2) What was so extremely shameful about the gospel that would lead Paul to have to make a statement like this?

A. *Understanding shame – the nature and power of shame*

- In the ancient world, shame was connected to one's reputation or identity. How one was viewed or esteemed by others produced a strong internal emotion of honor/glory or dishonor/disgrace from others who mattered to them, including the God they worshipped (which is why we might feel shame in the eyes of God even when no one else knows what we have done or while others may be heaping honor and glory on us).
- Shame always involves two other feelings (even if they are not justified or true) – embarrassment and guilt.
- ***Embarrassment*** – *situational, occasional*. What I feel when I make a mistake in front of others (*I tripped, I wore the wrong thing, I said the wrong thing, I spilled something on myself*).
- ***Guilt*** – *moral, ethical, or judicial*. It's what I feel when I fail to meet a standard or expectation that my conscience regards as a righteous benchmark set by an established authority over me. Guilt is an

emotion we feel but it can also be a state or condition we experience (I am guilty; I am condemned/sentenced).

- ***Shame*** – *something about me, my identity, or my reputation that others see as distasteful, disgraceful, or dishonorable.*
- We often experience one or more of these emotions – but deep, abiding shame involves all three (embarrassment, guilt, and shame) at their most crushing levels!
- ***Definition: Shame is the deep sense of exposure, dishonor, or unworthiness in the eyes of God or others resulting from sin, failure, or perceived inadequacy done by me, to me, or associated with me.***
- Shame comes because of something I did or didn't do, something that was done to me, or someone I am deeply identified or associated with who is shameful or despised!
- Shame becomes permanent when it becomes my reputation and eventually my identity or status.
- When shame becomes our identity, all sorts of suffering and pain arise, harming our relationships, skewing our perspective, and damaging our souls.
 - Shame crushes hope and robs us of true joy and peace.
 - Shame destroys transparency and authenticity – we hide from ourselves, from others, and from God.
 - Shame ruins meaningful relationships
 - If unaddressed, shame will ruin our friendships, vocation, ministry, and, eventually, our souls.
- Sometimes deep shame comes, not just from what we have done or even what has been done to others, ***but because we are undeniably and inescapably associated with a very shameful person.***

Illustration: a story of shame - Hitler's last living descendants – four brothers who made a pact never to have children so that the bloodline of their uncle would die with them. They changed their names, hid their heritage, and lived in secrecy to hide the shame that had come upon them simply because they had been born in a particular family.

- And that is the second thing Paul wants us to know in this verse – there is something deeply offensive and horrifically shameful in the gospel ***associated with a person*** – Jesus!

B. Seeing shame in the gospel – a crucified Jesus.

- Why would the gospel make someone like Paul ashamed?
- He is coming to Rome! Rome was the seat of power, wealth, might, strength, glory, honor, wisdom – over 1 million people — the largest city in the world! Every god had a temple. The Roman senate was filled with powerful, wealthy men who knew how to speak and use logic and rhetoric.
- Rome respected and honored wealth, power, might, and wisdom. They knew how to bestow honor and glory upon individuals and how to inflict shame. The worst form of shame this mighty Roman Empire could impose was condemning someone to death: subjecting them to reproach and dishonor in every imaginable way, and then publicly executing them by nailing their naked and abused body to a cross, leaving them there to die a slow, agonizing, and shame-filled death — an object of human contempt and horrific shame. It was the greatest humiliation in the most severe manner that could befall a human being in the Roman Empire – ***and that is what happened to Jesus of Nazareth.***

- And Paul announces to the Christians in a city that knew all about who deserved glory and who deserved dishonor and shame that he was not ashamed of the “good news” ***whose central focus was an individual who had been publicly, openly, and brutally shamed by the Roman government!***
- This is an amazingly bold statement. It is humanly impossible to explain, much less actually announce! Something huge must be going on here that goes way beyond what meets the outward eye!
- And there is . . . it is in the word “ashamed” (ἐπαισχύνομαι / αἰσχύνω). The first time this word shows up in our Bible is in Genesis 2:25, where two perfect image-bearers were given honor, glory, and dominion over a garden kingdom called Eden. The text states, ***“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed!”***
- However, just six short verses later, the man and woman found themselves hiding from God because they were naked and ashamed. Listen to the text: *Gen 3:7–10: Then the eyes of both were opened, and **they knew that they were naked**. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. ⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and **I was afraid, because I was naked**, and I hid myself.”*
- And from that moment forward, the whole human race found itself “naked and ashamed” before God because of sin!
- And this shame came on all the sons of Adam generation after generation! This is the root reason you and I experience shame for things we have done or things others have done to us! ***We were born into shame because of our association with Adam.*** The sin and shame that came upon him when he disobeyed God was passed on to each of his descendants. We all lived in the bondage of sin, are

guilty sinners under condemnation, bound up in shame – Adam’s and our own! And this went on for thousands of generations!

- Until one day a Son was born into that realm of sin and shame. He lived in that realm and suffered everything the shame of the curse brings upon fallen humans.
- However, this Son consistently obeyed and fully met every expectation and demand outlined in God’s righteous law! After fulfilling all righteousness, the one person in the history of our race who didn’t deserve shame took upon Himself all the guilt and shame of the world. He was relentlessly persecuted, ruthlessly maligned, and ultimately, the Roman government heaped all the shame they could onto one individual, inflicting it all on Jesus by crucifying Him on a cross. And when they did that, God removed all that shame (yours and mine included) and banished it!
- ***He took all our guilt and wiped it away! For the first time since Adam and Eve stood before God naked and ashamed, people like Paul (and you and I) could stand before God unashamed!***
- This is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he reminds us that Jesus suffered outside the city gate to make people holy through His own blood.. Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace (shame) He bore! (Heb. 13:12-13).
- And one day God wiped away all the guilt and shame from the life of a self-righteous, proud, spiritually blind Pharisee named Paul! And this former Pharisee stood up in a world filled with shame and pointed to the most shameful thing in the world of his day and said, ***“There is the reason I am not ashamed!! What happened on that cross wiped away my guilt and banished my shame – and what happened to me can happen to you!”*** And I am coming to you to proclaim this gospel because news this good is for sharing!

This leads us to the second question we need to ask Paul: What is it about the gospel that removes guilt and eliminates shame?

II. What is in the gospel that removes guilt and banishes shame?

For it is the power of God for salvation.

A. The gospel is energized by the effectual power of God.

- The term for power – “*dunamis*” – describes the insurmountable, unstoppable energy that comes from God that accomplishes whatever God determines to do for our good and His glory.
- When Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand this power, he described it in three ways:
 1. Immeasurably great energy/power (illustration of a bulldozer)
 2. Coming out of His great strength (illustration of a weightlifter)
 3. That accomplishes whatever God wills and what is humanly impossible (illustrated by original creation, resurrection, coronation, and new creation)

B. God uses this power to rescue and deliver hopeless sinners

- The phrase “for salvation” gives us the objective or goal to which God activates and directs His immense, unstoppable power!
- And the salvation in view here is much more than just a salvation that saves us from hell – it is a full-orbed deliverance!
- The gospel contains the power of God, which He uses to deliver us fully from the disaster of sin! He delivers us from the penalty of sin (justification). He delivers us from the power sin has over us (sanctification). He will one day deliver us from the very presence of

sin in us (glorification). His power accomplishes a rich, robust, full-orbed deliverance that is humanly impossible!

- **Illustration:** Jonah – at the bottom of an ocean, in the belly of a great fish, almost out of air and almost out of life – “Salvation (deliverance) comes only from the Lord!” (Jon. 2:9).
- What is it you are struggling with this morning? A besetting sin that you can’t seem to shake? A depression that won’t lift? A fear that cripples you? A sorrow that pervades your soul and threatens to darken your future? A stain you can’t wipe away? A reputation you can’t seem to change no matter how hard you try?
- Paul stands before you at the top of Mount Everest and says, “**No more guilt! No more shame! Look – there is God’s power to save!**”

Which brings us to the third and final question we need to ask Paul: ***How can someone like me access the power and benefit from the deliverance Paul talks about in these verses?***

III. How can someone obtain this life-changing benefit for themselves?

To everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

A. It is available to anyone, anywhere, at any time!

- This freedom from sin, death, and the devil is available to all regardless of who they are – **to everyone!**
- This freedom is available to all regardless of what they have or have not done (whether the shameful immorality of the pagans described in 1:18-32, or the shameful self-righteous religiosity of the Jews described in 2:1-29).
- No matter who you are, what you are, or what you have done . . . the freedom from guilt and shame in the gospel is available to you!!

- Listen to Paul talk about this to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ **And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

B. It is available to anyone who will believe and keep believing!

- “Who believes” – this is the fundamental, basic requirement that breaks the power of shame. Note the present tense of this verb.
 - This phrase “*all who believe*” occurs for other times in Romans: 3:22, 4:11, 10:4, 11.
1. We have to **believe the content** of the gospel (which is why we need to remember 1 Corinthians 15:1-5).
 2. We have to **trust the person** who is at the heart of the gospel (which is why we need to remember Romans 1:3-4).
 - ***And that is the thrust of the term “faith” that Paul uses here . . . we must place our trust in a person, not just in historical facts and theological propositions about that person.***
 - We have to fully align ourselves with Him, arrange ourselves under Him, and own Him as our Savior and Lord!
 3. We have to **keep believing** (present tense) (which is why we need to remember Romans 1:16-17).
 - We don’t go to heaven on yesterday’s faith; we don’t get delivered from today’s guilt and tomorrow’s shame by yesterday’s faith.

- We are saved by our ongoing right-now faith that started yesterday (at some point in the past) but that is alive and well and growing today (present in us now)!

Conclusion: *So how can I be delivered from the crushing weight of guilt and the horrific burden of shame I can't seem to shake?*

We have asked Paul three questions – here are three he would ask you:

1. ***Have you truly believed the gospel?*** Have you confessed and turned from your sin (repentance)? Have you turned to God and believed what He told you to believe about His Son?
2. ***Are you persevering in your belief?*** Is that belief alive and well? Is the power from God that caused you to believe preserving your belief today?
3. ***Are you preaching the gospel to yourself?*** Do you understand the immense thing God did through Christ's death? Do you understand the immeasurable power God has made available to you through Christ's resurrection?

- In other words, do you really understand the gospel you believed when you got saved?
- You will never experience a culture of grace in your life and we will never cultivate that kind of a culture as a church until we understand the gospel, which is why Paul wrote this amazing letter to us!
- So read it regularly!
- Make diligent effort to understand and apply it personally!
- Rejoice in its truths daily!
- Thank God for it prayerfully!

- Share it boldly!