

## Romans: A Solid Foundation for Christian Living

### Message 7: What's So Great About the Gospel?

Text: Romans 1:16-17

I can remember, back when I was in college, sitting in a few classes and asking, "Why am I here? Why am I listening to this? What's the point?" This usually in classes like Freshman English, Literature, Bonehead Math, and the occasional lecture in Polly Davis' history class. I wanted to be out in full-time ministry, leading people to Christ and helping them to grow. And I didn't understand why God had me in school, learning all this stuff that had no connection with real life.

And then came graduate school. And in seminary I discovered that the expectations were much higher for graduate work than for undergrad. A deeper level of research was required, and better writing. More intelligence was required in my arguments. And I found myself wishing I had paid more attention back in college. For the truth is, they weren't just wasting my time. They were teaching foundational truths that would enable me to function with wisdom and intelligence in the years ahead.

Well, this morning I wonder if we don't do the same with our spiritual lives. What I mean is this: today, everyone wants to get on to the practical. They want messages that give simple solutions to life's problems: how to make the most of your life; how to overcome debt; how to be a more forgiving person. And there's a place for such messages. But it seems that many Christians today lack an appetite for the foundational truths of the faith. Like when I was in class, we want to get on to what really matters. "Don't waste our time with doctrine." But what we fail to understand is that, without the foundation in place, all the other messages have nothing on which to stand. Everything in your Christian faith rises or falls based on the strength of the foundation. And that foundation is the gospel: the message of God's grace; the story of God's love for us, and our reconciliation with Him through Jesus Christ.

**The gospel is the foundational truth of Christianity, upon which all else stands.** This means that, for anything else in Christianity to make sense, we need to have a deep understanding of and appreciation for it. And it's why, in ch. 1, verse 15, Paul says, "...I am so eager to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome." The Romans are saved, but he longs to preach to them the gospel. Why? Look back at verse 11: "... so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong." In other words, Paul longed to build up the Roman Christians by insuring that their lives were appropriately set on the foundation for Christian life: the gospel of Christ. The gospel message was not merely their entryway to heaven; it was the basic truth on which everything else depended.

And so it is that we come to our text this morning: Romans 1:16-17. Here Paul transitions from his introduction to the main point of his letter. He has

just explained why he longed to see them – to preach the gospel to them. Now, he explains why that gospel matters. Listen to the word of God...

These two verses comprise the thesis statement for Romans. They are the heart of Paul's message explaining why Christians should understand and appreciate the basic gospel message. Paul says, "*I'm not ashamed of this gospel.*" In other words, I am bold about it. I've not outgrown it, preferring something meaty and practical. I don't cower from it in the presence of the world. I am bold in my communication of it, and my commitment to it." Why? "*Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*"

Now here in these words, Paul explains what's so great about the gospel. What makes it worth our time and attention, even years after we first came to know it? What makes it worth our time when there is so much else in the Bible to be taught? Well, here we find two reasons:

#### 1. The gospel is God's power for salvation.

Vs. 16: "*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*" Notice that the gospel is not merely a switch to the power of God, or a conduit for the power of God. The gospel message – the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ – is the very power of God that brings one to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now when Paul uses the word salvation, it seldom speaks merely of coming to faith in Christ – being converted from lost to saved – but it certainly includes it. So one thing Paul means to say is that the gospel is the way by which you and I come to faith (Rom. 10:14-15: "How can they call on the one they have not believed in? how can they believe in whom they have not heard...").

How does this happen? Vs. 17: "*a righteousness from God is revealed that is by faith...*"

So the gospel is the cornerstone of Christianity. You do not have the Christian faith apart from this truth.

#### 2. The gospel is God's plan for sanctification.

Vs. 16: "*power of God for salvation...*" As I said, in Paul's use the word salvation seldom speaks of merely becoming a Christian. It most often speaks of the totality of Christian life: new birth, through life, until heaven.

And so the gospel is not only the power of God to be saved. It is the power of God to grow in that salvation until we reach it's climax when we too will stand with the Lord. This is why, in vs. 17, Paul says that the righteousness of God is by "by faith from first to last." I like the way most translations put

it: “from faith to faith.” It is by means of faith, to the end that a greater faith grows.

See, the gospel not only tells us how to be saved. It tells us how to live for Christ, too. “The righteous will *live* by faith.” The same truth that saves you is the faith by which we are to live.

And this is where the gospel becomes especially practical to our spiritual growth. Too often people get saved and forget the gospel, or even believe they’ve outgrown it (lady in former church). But what happens is that we go from salvation by grace to a Christian life of works – our work, our power, our strength. And that’s what all the practical outlines tend to leave us. But God says that we are to live by faith – we are to trust Him. And when we go back and reflect on the gospel, we realize that our best is still not good enough; our power is still not great enough. Just as on our own we cannot save ourselves, on our own we cannot live for God. We need Him just as much. We need His righteousness. We need His strength.

The gospel reminds us of this. So then, with a fresh understanding of the gospel, we then add the other truths we learn, and they make sense. They are doable, because they don’t rest on our power but His.

**Conclusion: The gospel message is the foundational truth upon which all else in your faith rests.** It is God’s power for salvation. It is God’s plan for sanctification. Miss this, and little else in God’s word makes sense. Get it, and you will be on your way to a growing faith, a strong and sturdy faith.

Paul would go on to develop this thought through most of the Roman letter, but as we come to a close today, what should we do in response?

Perhaps you simply need to go back and savor the basic message of the gospel. Praise the Lord for it. Love Him for it. Treasure Him....

Or maybe you need to commit to building on its foundation in your life...

Finally, perhaps this morning you need to fully embrace it...