

## **The Gift! Those Justified By Faith Will Live.**

Romans 1:16-17, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:23-26

In 1501, in Germany, a bright but somewhat fearful college student was once caught outside in a fearsome thunderstorm. When lightning struck a nearby tree he cried out in panic "*save me, St. Anne, and I'll become a monk!*" (St. Anne being the patron saint of miners—his father's profession). And true to his word, surviving the storm, he then shifted from studying law to theology and became a monk.

But his first few years of monastery life were difficult, as he did not find the spiritual peace he was seeking. He could not reconcile how his sinful life would ever be acceptable to a Holy God the judge.

Then, at age 27, he was given the honor of attending a church conference in Rome, from which he came away even more discouraged by the immorality and corruption he witnessed there among the Catholic priests. Upon his return to Germany in an attempt to resolve his spiritual turmoil, he enrolled in the university for further study. Eventually, having received a doctorate in theology, he became a professor at the university but still could find no spiritual peace. Psalm 22, echoing Christ's cry for mercy on the cross, became his own declaration of disillusionment with God and the Church: *my God, my God, why have you forsaken me.*

But in 1515 all this changed. While preparing a lecture on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he read, "*The just will live by faith.*" He dwelt on this statement for some time, finally realizing that the key to his salvation was not to fear God, or be enslaved by religious dogma, but to trust God's promise that faith alone would bring salvation. And from that moment forward Martin Luther was transformed from a fearful monk to a fearless crusader and the Protestant reformation was born. Like the Apostle Paul before him, Luther now boldly stood before Church Councils that sought his death declaring:

*I am not ashamed of the gospel;  
it is the power of God for salvation  
to everyone who has faith....  
For in it the righteousness of God is revealed  
through faith for faith; as it is written,  
'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'*  
Romans 1:16-17

But why would Paul even write such a statement: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel"? Why would anyone be ashamed of the Gospel?

If you think Martin Luther's Catholic culture was hostile to the Gospel, it was nothing compared to what Paul faced in first century Rome. Rome was a proud city, while Gospel of Jesus Christ came out of one of the little nations Rome had conquered. Few if any Roman Christians were among the elite of society, they were mostly slaves and working class. Rome had known great philosophers, why pay attention to a fable about a Jew who rose from the dead. And everything that Christianity taught ran counter to Roman values, Roman power, Roman pride, Roman dignity; *"to think of a little Jewish tentmaker going to Rome to preach such a message is almost humorous."*

Yes, the fear of Rome hung over the empire like a cloud. They were the conquerors of the known world and Roman legions were stationed everywhere; yet they were still a weak nation. One of their greatest philosophers called Rome *"a cesspool of iniquity"* (Seneca). Another declared that *"Rome was a sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood"* (Juvenile). It is no wonder Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel. He was taking to Rome the one message that could change Roman lives forever, a message he had already seen powerfully work in the sinful cities of Corinth and Ephesus. (Wiersbe [NT Commentary](#), pg 412).

So let's take a few moments to consider our own fearfulness as we look into this Good News which Paul unashamedly is bringing to us directly from God.

The first question you might ask is: why would Paul even speak of not being ashamed of such Good News supposedly coming directly from God? As another preacher once noted, *"there's no sense in declaring that you are not ashamed of something unless you've been tempted to feel ashamed of it"*. And there is no doubt that Paul had felt this temptation. He told the Corinthians that he had come to them *in weakness and in fear and much trembling* (1 Cor. 2:3). He knew that the message of the cross was *foolishness to some and a stumbling block to others* (1 Cor. 1:18, 23). So how did he (how do we) overcome this temptation to be ashamed? We overcome it by remembering that this message, so despised by some, carries within it *the power of God for the salvation of all who believe it*. Ultimately we can only know the truthfulness of this message and its saving power as we have personally experienced it for ourselves. Have we been reconciled to God through Christ, forgiven of our sins, made children of God, indwelt and transformed by God's Holy Spirit? How then could we possibly be ashamed of the Gospel? (Stott, [Message to Romans](#), pg 60).

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

Another reason not to be ashamed is that this is not our message but God's—as Paul's Ephesians letter describes it—the Gospel makes clear that salvation is God's gracious offer, it is God's GIFT to us. It is Godly provided, Godly secured and offered to *everyone who will receive it*; we are merely the messenger.

It is neither Obamacare nor Socialism, but saving faith that is the great leveler of all people. Everyone who is saved is saved the very same way; whether Jew or Gentile, emperor or pauper, we all receive God's gift, this offered salvation through our faith in the ability of Jesus to save all who trust in him. Jesus himself said that he was not one of many; the only way for us to get back to God would be *through him* (John 14:6). And this was the same message boldly repeated by his apostles: *for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we can be saved* (Acts 4:12). So while God's offer of salvation is very exclusive (*narrow is the way and few there are who find it*) it is freely offered to everyone: *Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift* (Rev. 22:17)

So the Gospel message speaks to us of God's offered gift—His ability to save us if we put our faith in Him to do so. **But how can God give us such a gift? How can a righteous God remain righteous while finding a way to forgive us for our sins—without our having to pay for them?** This question is what the first half of Romans explains in detail, but right here Paul gives us a very big hint:

*For in it [within the message of the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith.* In other words this God-sent message—in its fuller form—will explain how God is able to maintain His own righteousness while extending such undeserved saving righteousness to us as well. The simplest explanation of “how” God can do this can be found a little further into Paul's letter: (Romans 3:23-26.)

since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;  
they are now justified by his grace as a gift,  
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,  
whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, ...  
[so God] himself is righteous and justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.  
Romans 3:23-26

There it is—this is the message, this is the GOOD NEWS from God that Paul unashamedly offered to Rome and continues to offer to you and me.

- Since we, as sinners, could never earn our own justification (the righteousness needed for our salvation)

- God in the person of Jesus paid the penalty for us—his death in exchange for ours
- So that he might offer us “justification” a declaration of our righteousness, as His gift to us. And all we can do is accept it by faith.

That is why Paul said the very heart of this message is that my salvation, your salvation, is God’s gift given to me, to you, and to all who will accept it by faith

**the one who is  
justified by faith  
will live**

That is why Paul concluded his introduction to the Gospel with this life changing declaration: *The one who is justified by faith will live.*

Now I know that’s not quite how your Bible translates this last phrase, but this is actually the way Paul wrote it, which better lines up with similar Pauline declarations (Romans 3:26, Galatians 3:11).

Do you remember that author J.K. Rowling began her now legendary Harry Potter series with the story of one wizard who had finally crafted something long sought by his profession: a stone that would grant its owner eternal life—here on this earth. There was only one life granting stone ever made and none since. So this stone had to be carefully hidden and protected for all the most power hungry persons in the world sought to find and own that stone for themselves so that they alone might be the one person who would live forever.

Now that’s a very entertaining but still made up story, made all the more unbelievable when you realize the God of our universe has already offered eternal life freely—as His gift—to anyone and everyone who will by faith accept it. And even better it’s an eternal life not life on this corrupted and decaying earth but in heaven both with God our savior and our entire family of brothers and sisters who have accepted the same gift.

It is this life changing message, this Gospel, this GOOD NEWS of God’s gift that Paul, even while wearing prisoner’s chains, still fearlessly brought to Rome. And this is the same message which transformed the broken heart of an African saint, the fearful heart of a Catholic monk, the doubting heart of a Methodist missionary, and the liberal heart of a Swiss theologian. And if you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your savior, it has changed your heart as well—forever.

But here in modern America there are many who, unlike Paul, unlike Martin Luther, do appear to be ashamed of the Gospel. Not wanting to be accused of being “holier than thou,” they are afraid to say one word to their friends about Christ, lest they be accused of shoving religion down another’s throat. And just as Paul warned, there are still those who, for whatever their darkened reasons, will not want to hear this Good News. So, if our efforts get rebuffed enough times, pretty soon we may also find ourselves tempted to be embarrassed by our faith, even while the message we carry still has all the power of God behind it for the salvation of all who believe it.

Did you know that the Greek word for “power” is “*dunamis*” from which we get our word dynamite!

This message from God, that we have been given to share that *the one who is justified by faith will live*, is true spiritual dynamite; it has the power to change lives forever. How then could we ever be shamed into silence? But if you feel the temptation to be quiet about your faith, then think for a few moments on this warning from Jesus to you.

*Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.’*  
Mark 8:38

So let’s think about this and pray about this and ask God for boldness of heart so that we, like Paul, will never be ashamed of the Gospel.