

Unashamed

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Unashamed: Paul's Magnum Opus

Paul declares that the gospel is not something to hide, soften, or apologize for—it is the very power of God for salvation. In Romans 1:16–17, we see that this power is revealed in a righteousness that comes from God and is received entirely by faith, from beginning to end. The gospel doesn't just improve lives; it rescues and redefines them. Because of that, we don't shrink back—we stand firm, unashamed of the message that saves.

Introduction

- There are certain images in literature that linger in the imagination long after the details of the story fade away.
 - A white Puritan village.
 - Dark clothing.
 - Cold faces.
 - A crowded marketplace.
 - **And standing at the center of it all, a woman with a scarlet letter stitched across her chest.**
 - Even people who have never read *The Scarlet Letter* understand the image immediately.
 - Nathaniel Hawthorne created something larger than a character.
 - He created a symbol - one scarlet “A” became a picture of shame carried in public view.
 - The letter announced guilt before a word was spoken.
 - Every conversation passed through it.
 - Every stare settled on it.
 - Every whisper circled around it.

- Hester Prynne walked through life carrying a visible reminder of failure.
- And for generations, readers have felt the weight of that image because somewhere deep inside every human heart lives the fear of exposure.
 - People spend enormous amounts of energy managing what others see.
 - A carefully constructed image.
 - A polished version of ourselves.
 - A public face designed for admiration.
 - A private world hidden behind locked doors.
- Humanity has become extraordinarily skilled at presentation.
 - We brighten photographs.
 - Filter opinions.
 - Rehearse conversations.
 - Control impressions.
 - Curate identities.
- An entire digital world now exists where people build online versions of themselves like museum exhibits.
 - Every image receives careful attention.
 - Every caption receives editing.
 - Every weakness stays tucked behind curtains like old furniture in a locked attic.
- And underneath all of it sits a universal longing: the longing to appear righteous before the watching world.
 - Because shame carries a crushing weight.
 - Shame whispers: “If people truly knew you...”
 - Shame follows people into quiet moments.

- Into sleepless nights.
- Into church pews.
- Into marriages.
- Into conversations with God.
- Some people carry shame over moral failure.
 - Some carry shame over addiction.
 - Some carry shame over wounds inflicted by others.
 - Some carry shame over words spoken years ago that still echo like ghosts through the hallway of memory.
- And the human instinct toward hiding reaches all the way back to the opening pages of Scripture.
 - [Genesis 3](#) tells the story of humanity's first sin, and immediately the atmosphere changes.
 - Adam and Eve suddenly see themselves differently.
 - Their innocence dissolved.
 - Their joy fractured.
 - Their hearts flooded with fear.
 - So they sew fig leaves together.
 - Then they hide among the trees.
 - Picture the scene for a moment.
 - The man and woman who once walked openly with God now crouch behind bushes in the garden like fugitives.
 - Leaves cover their bodies.
 - Fear grips their hearts.
 - Creation itself suddenly feels unfamiliar.

- Sin brought shame.
- Shame brought hiding.
- And humanity has continued the pattern ever since.
- Every culture develops its own fig leaves.
 - Achievement becomes a fig leaf.
 - Success becomes a fig leaf.
 - Religion becomes a fig leaf.
 - Humor becomes a fig leaf.
 - Pride becomes a fig leaf.
 - Self-righteousness becomes a fig leaf.
- People build entire lives attempting to outrun the feeling that something inside remains broken.
 - Which makes [Romans 1](#) feel so startling.
 - The Apostle Paul writes these words into the beating heart of the Roman Empire:
 - “For I am not ashamed of the gospel...”
- Rome stood as the center of wealth, military strength, political authority, philosophy, education, and cultural prestige.
 - Marble temples towered over the streets.
 - Caesar’s image appeared throughout the empire.
 - Roman power felt eternal.
- And into that world walks a former Pharisee proclaiming a crucified Jewish Messiah from a tiny corner of the empire.
 - A message about a cross.
 - A message about sin.

- A message about salvation through faith.
- A message declaring that humanity stands guilty before a holy God.
- To many people in Rome, the gospel sounded weak.
 - Foolish.
 - Backward.
 - Offensive.
 - Yet Paul writes with astonishing clarity:
 - “I am not ashamed.”
 - That sentence lands with force because every human heart understands shame.
 - People hide careers that collapsed.
 - Hide habits that enslave.
 - Hide bitterness.
 - Hide lust.
 - Hide envy.
 - Hide insecurity.
 - Hide scars from childhood.
 - Hide fears about the future.
 - Hide sins committed in secret.
- Some carry shame like Hester Prynne carried that scarlet letter: close to the chest, visible in every moment, heavy with memory.
 - Others carry shame quietly beneath polished appearances while smiling through conversations and worship services.
 - But [Romans 1](#) introduces a gospel powerful enough to free people from hiding.

- A gospel that brings sinners into the light.
- A gospel that replaces fig leaves with righteousness.
- A gospel that frees a man to stand in the capital city of the empire and declare these words with complete confidence.
- This morning, we come to one of the greatest declarations in all of Scripture.
- And buried within these two verses stands a truth powerful enough to liberate every person still hiding among the trees.

Scripture Reading

Romans 1:16–17 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.

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

- These two verses contain enough theological power to shake the world.
- In many ways, [Romans 1:16–17](#) functions like a thunderstorm sitting on the horizon.
 - I mean, it’s only two verses.
 - A few lines on a page.
 - A short statement from the Apostle Paul.
 - But these sentences are profoundly important
- Meteorologists tell us that a single thunderstorm can contain the energy equivalent to that released by an atomic bomb.
 - Lightning can reach temperatures hotter than the surface of the sun.
 - Massive forces swirl invisibly inside the cloud long before the first visible strike reaches the ground.
- And that’s exactly what [Romans 1:16–17](#) feels like.

- Every phrase carries enormous weight.
- “The gospel...”
- “The power of God...”
- “Salvation...”
- “The righteousness of God...”
- “Faith...”
- Paul compresses the central truths of Christianity into two verses, and then for the next sixteen chapters he unfolds the storm cloud one flash at a time.
 - These verses contain the thesis of Romans.
 - They contain the answer to humanity’s shame problem.
 - They contain the hope of salvation.
 - They contain the explanation for how sinful people can stand righteous before a holy God.
- And the storm begins with a bold declaration from the Apostle Paul:
 - “For I am not ashamed of the gospel...”
 - That statement lands with force because shame has haunted humanity since Eden.
 - Adam hid among the trees.
 - Humanity has hidden ever since.
- But now Paul walks openly into the streets of Rome carrying the very message the world considered foolish, offensive, and weak, and he declares:
 - “I am not ashamed.”
 - So the question becomes: How does a man become unashamed in a world built on shame?

- And Paul begins answering that question with our first truth this morning:

The Gospel Is Worthy of Open Identification (v. 16a)

- When developing this sermon series, it became very clear that these verses were the key verses that unlock the entire book.
 - I've always been intrigued with ancient battles.
 - Two armies lining up across some distant battlefield from one another.
 - For me, the most interesting soldier on the battlefield is the standard-bearer.
 - The standard bearer carried: the flag - the identity of the army, kingdom, legion, or king.
 - In battle, smoke, dust, chaos, screaming, and movement could make organization almost impossible.
 - So soldiers looked for the standard.
 - The biggest problem for the standard bearer is that he also carried a giant flag that said, "Here I am..."
 - That means that standard bearers had to be exceptionally brave, loyal to the commander, and willing to be targeted early and often.
- That's the message that Paul is sending here.
 - He's carrying the Gospel-standard right into the heart of an empire that rejects it.
 - But Rome didn't just reject the Gospel because it was new.
 - It sounded weak.
 - After all, this Christianity thing was based on a guy that was crucified.
 - In fact, the crucifixion of Jesus is kind of important to the story of the Gospel.

- The point of crucifixion wasn't just execution. There were far more efficient methods for killing those condemned for crimes against Rome.
- Crucifixion was meant to display the power of Rome against her opponents, to shame the condemned and their followers.
- But Paul carries that standard without shame.
- Here we are on the other side of 2 millennia of church history.
- The Gospel that Paul brought to the heart of the Roman Empire has made quite an impact across the globe.
- Surely, the Gospel that was so dangerous in Paul's day has become a rather normal part of our civilization after 2,000 years.
- Sadly, we do still face plenty of opposition to the Gospel and the temptation for us to blunt it's sharp edges is as real as it ever was.
- Paul said, "I am unashamed of the Gospel."
- We look at our modern world with a bit of timidity and whisper under our breath, "I might be a little embarrassed of the Gospel."
- The Gospel makes claims like...
 - [John 14:6](#) "6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
 - Or [Acts 4:12](#) "12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
 - The world says, "all religions are equally valid."
 - The Gospel says marriage is to be between one man and one woman and is to be a beautiful parable of the relationship between Christ and his church...the world says, "Let's pervert that in any way possible"
 - The Gospel says our morals are informed by our Creator...the world says, "Don't judge me."

- God says that there is no one righteous...the world says, “I’m a good person.”
- God says I will satisfy my wrath against sin at the cross, and the world looks at the cross and mocks the justice of God.
- And we hear those rebuttals and we are tempted to lower the Gospel standard and wave a white flag instead!
 - And the Gospel says that there is only one way to make peace with a world that is hopelessly dead in sin.
 - The temptation for us to hide is real. To seek cultural approval instead of biblical faithfulness.
 - And that’s a partnership that can never work.
- When Adam and Eve decided to pursue sin instead of faithfulness, they hid themselves because of their shame.
- The Apostle Paul, redeemed by the blood of Jesus walked into the streets of Rome proclaiming a crucified savior.
 - Why can he do that?
 - What does he have that Adam and Eve lacked?

The Gospel Possesses the Power Humanity Needs (v. 16b)

- Paul says it with out apology“...for it is the power of God for salvation...”
- Of course, power was something that Rome understood.
 - I just finished up listening to a 3-hour podcast on Julius Caesar.
 - It isn’t a stretch to say that Roman civilization was built on power
- Rome understood military power.
 - During Paul’s ministry, the Roman military was the most disciplined and feared fighting force on earth.
 - Their banners marched across continents.

- Their roads stretched across the empire.
- Their soldiers built forts, bridges, cities, and battlefields wherever they went.
- Rome projected power everywhere.
 - And behind every Roman eagle stood the terrifying reminder:
 - Caesar rules the world.
- The emperor was seen as a god.
- It's hard to have more political power than that.
- And if you've read your New Testament, one thing becomes clear - if you choose to defy the power of the empire, you had better be ready to pay the price.
- Rome understood power...
- Yet, despite the fact that the empire possessed hundreds of thousands of disciplined soldiers, military brilliance, and the power to conquer nations; despite the power of Caesar
 - Rome could not forgive a single sin.
 - Rome could crucify rebels.
 - The gospel could resurrect dead sinners.
 - Rome couldn't reconcile sinners to God.
 - Only the Gospel can do that.
- Which is why it is so important for us today to understand.
 - The gospel is not:
 - Good advice
 - An inspirational story of sacrifice.
 - A self-help plan to help you live your best life now.
 - The gospel is that thunderstorm of salvation.

- It is unimaginable divine power unleashed through its proclamation.
 - Nothing else has the power of the Gospel.
- And the salvation it secures is comprehensive.
 - **It is the rescue from sin...**
 - [Romans 6:23](#) “23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - **It is the rescue from God’s wrath...**
 - [Romans 5:9](#) “9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”
 - **It is the rescue from condemnation**
 - [Romans 8:1](#) “1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
 - **It is the power to reconcile us to God...**
 - [Romans 5:10](#) “10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”
- And don’t miss that next part...
 - “To everyone who believes”
 - This is absolutely incredible.
 - This means that the Gospel is absolutely exclusive.
 - There is no other way to be saved.
 - But it is absolutely accessible.
 - It isn’t for a particular class of people.
 - It isn’t for a particular race of people.

- It is for anyone and everyone who would believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- People today are looking for ways to be saved from the inherent shame they feel.
 - But there is only one solution.
 - Only one option truly has the power to save.
 - I am unashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.
- It has that power because it completely solves our greatest problem.
- **Look at v. 17:**

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.”

The Gospel Reveals the Righteousness Humanity Lacks (v. 17)

- This will be a theme that Paul revisits throughout this letter.
- We have a fundamental deficiency...
 - We stand guilty before a holy God.
 - We’re condemned.
 - We have violate God’s law...every single one of us.
 - And as a result, we are bankrupt of righteousness.
 - Righteousness is living in perfect alignment with God’s standards and definitions.
 - And the bible is very clear - there are none righteous.
 - **Paul will emphasize this later in [Romans 3:10-12](#)**

Romans 3:10–12 ESV

¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

- Adam and Eve tried to fix their problem with fig leaves and the reality is fig leaves cannot cover sin.
- The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God to us.
 - God provides for us that which we cannot provide for ourselves.
 - You could work your whole life and never be righteous.
 - You’ll never stand before a holy God in your own merit.
 - You’ll never earn righteousness by your own works.
 - You need a greater righteousness.
 - And that is revealed in the gospel...
- But it isn’t just shown to us with a disclaimer, “Look what you’re missing out on.”
 - That wouldn’t be good news if that were the case.
 - But that’s why the Gospel is so good because in it we are made righteous through Jesus.
 - God gifts this righteousness to us.
 - **Paul would say it this way to the church at Philippi...**

Philippians 3:8–9 ESV

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

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—

- And Paul reminds us here that this righteousness is received through faith.
- It isn't achieved, earned, worked for.
- It is received. It is imputed.
- In [Romans 4](#), Paul points to Abraham's faith as the prime example.

Romans 4:3 ESV

³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

- And Paul doubles down on this with the statement, "from faith for faith."
- That's an odd phrase, but it's doing a lot of heavy lifting for us here.
- This means that the Gospel reveals God's righteousness to us from beginning to end.
- It is faith from first to last.
- This is a way for Paul to emphasize this...it's a grammatical exclamation point.
- This is making it clear, in no uncertain terms, that salvation is entirely by faith and nothing else.
- The whole Christian life rests on faith.
- And lest we think that this is a new idea, Paul turns our attention back to the Old Testament with a quote from the prophet Habakkuk.
- That quote will become the spine for Paul's argument in this letter.
- "The righteous shall live by faith."
- In no uncertain terms, this means the death of self-righteousness.
 - You don't have it in you to fix this.
 - I like to think I can fix stuff if you can show me a YouTube video of someone else doing it.
 - But there aren't any YouTube videos that can fix this problem.

- At the same time, this is the foundation of assurance!
 - Thank God salvation isn't based on anything we can do.
 - Because we'd never know when we've done enough.
 - Because salvation is secured by God, we never have to worry about the word "ENOUGH"!
- Adam and Eve tried to cover their shame with leaves.
 - But thanks be to God that the Gospel clothes sinners in the righteousness of Christ!

Invitation

- From the opening pages of Scripture, humanity has lived in hiding.
- Adam and Eve hid among the trees.
 - Ever since then, people have spent their lives sewing fig leaves together.
 - Some hide behind success.
 - Some hide behind religion.
 - Some hide behind morality.
 - Some hide behind humor.
 - Some hide behind church attendance.
 - Some hide behind carefully managed appearances.
 - But underneath all the layers sits the same reality: guilt before a holy God.
 - That's the human condition.
- And Romans says something staggering:
 - "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith..."

- The Gospel reveals that the righteousness we need before God is not something we achieve.
- It is something God provides through Jesus Christ.
- That's why Paul can say:
 - "I am not ashamed of the gospel..."
 - Because the Gospel settled the deepest issue in the universe.
 - How can sinful people stand righteous before a holy God?
 - And the answer is: through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Church, the Son of God stepped into our shame publicly so that sinners could stand before God unashamed eternally.
 - Think about the irony of the cross.
 - Rome used crucifixion as the ultimate symbol of humiliation.
 - Public exposure.
 - Public disgrace.
 - Public shame.
 - Jesus was mocked publicly.
 - Stripped publicly.
 - Condemned publicly.
 - Crucified publicly.
- The sinless Son of God stepped into the shame of sinners so that sinners could receive His righteousness.
 - That is the Gospel.
 - And maybe this morning, you've spent your entire life hiding.
 - Hiding sin.
 - Hiding addiction.

- Hiding guilt.
- Hiding fear.
- Hiding wounds.
- Hiding shame.
- Trying desperately to construct a version of yourself righteous enough to stand before God.
- Friend, fig leaves have never saved anybody.
 - Religion cannot save you.
 - Morality cannot save you.
 - Good intentions cannot save you.
 - Church attendance cannot save you.
- But the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.
 - Not everyone who performs.
 - Not everyone who cleans themselves up first.
 - Everyone who believes.
- That means today, right where you are, you can come to Christ by faith.
 - You can stop hiding.
 - You can lay down the exhausting burden of trying to justify yourself.
 - You can come to the crucified and risen Christ who alone can forgive sin, remove condemnation, reconcile you to God, and clothe you in His righteousness.
- And for the believer in this room: why would we hide the very message that rescued us?
 - Paul walked openly into the streets of Rome carrying the Gospel-standard high.

- And the same Gospel that saved sinners in the shadow of Caesar still saves sinners today.
- So church: carry the banner high.
- The world may mock it.
- Culture may reject it.
- The empire may rage against it.
- But we should boldly echo the courage of Paul:
 - “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”