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## Romans 1:14-17 “Becoming Passionate about the Gospel”

Intro. The apostle Paul was without question one of the greatest preachers and missionaries who has ever lived. And in this passage of Scripture we discover why. In v.15 Paul said, “So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.” The word translated “ready” (*prothumos*) also means “willing, eager.” It includes the idea of being ready and willing with passion (*thumos*). He was eager and passionate about sharing the gospel.

Eagerness can be a wonderful trait. It moves us to action. I had several dogs that displayed eagerness. If I were to say, “Do you want to go for a ride?” every dog I ever owned would get all excited, tail wagging, and head to the door, or head to the car or truck. If a dog can be eager & excited about going for a ride, how much more should we be eager and passionate about sharing the soul saving, life changing good news of Jesus Christ?

However, too many Christians today are not eager or passionate about sharing the gospel. So often, when we could speak for Christ, we don't. When we could be bold, we aren't. This is a real problem in the church today. Several years ago I read that nearly 80% of Southern Baptists have never shared their faith with someone.

What's wrong? One problem is implied in v.16. Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...” Why would he even need to say this? Evidently, some Christians were acting ashamed of the gospel. That's because many in Paul's day looked down on the message of Jesus Christ. After all, in the eyes of many in Rome, Jesus had at least 3 strikes against Him: He was Jewish, He was poor, and most of all, He had been crucified. Pagan Rome with her pomp and splendor tended to look with scorn upon such a message. The Jews stumbled over the gospel. They said it was heresy, or even blasphemy. Paul said in I Cor. 1:23 that the Greeks considered the gospel foolishness, and often laughed at it.

Even so, in our day, when a large portion of the press and the stars of popular culture look with disdain at gospel truths, it is hard for some of us to keep the gospel banner flying high. Some Christians become ashamed of the gospel, or at least they act like they are ashamed of it. They are afraid of what some people are going to think. Many modify the gospel to make it more acceptable to the world. We have quite a few preachers on TV that preach a health & wealth gospel rather than the true gospel of Christ.

So I ask you, “Are you ashamed of the gospel? Are *you* passionate about sharing the gospel? Are you eager to serve the Lord, and further the cause of Christ?” Based on the number of people who have been saved the last 6 months, I would have to say not many of us are. So this morning I want to share with you several factors that made Paul passionate & unashamed about sharing the gospel. These same factors can create in us a passion for sharing the gospel, and a passion for missions. First of all, we should be passionate about sharing the gospel:

### I. FOR WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO DISCHARGE

Paul became a great missionary and soul winner because he had a great burden, a sense of debt & obligation. He said in v.14, “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.” The word translated “debtor” (*opheiletēs*) refers to one who is a debtor; one who is obligated to do something.

Most all of us have been in debt, and many of us are *still* in debt. We know what it feels like. That obligation weighs upon you like a burden until the debt is fully paid. Are you faithfully paying your debts? If you don't pay your debts, there will be serious consequences. Mess up your credit rating & you will be driving of the lot in an old subcompact, like in the commercial!

Let me give another example of an obligation. When you become a parent, you take on certain obligations to take care of your children, to provide for them, care for them, to teach them right from wrong. And most of those obligations are not fulfilled until they become adults and are out on their own.

Well Paul rightly understood that he was under obligation to share the good news of Jesus Christ. He stated in 1 Cor. 9:16, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." He felt that he could not be free from his debt until he had told as many people as possible the Good News of salvation in Christ. Paul was sure to pay his spiritual debts.

Quite honestly, most of us do not share that burden. We do not sense a debt to share the gospel. So we do very little. Just as it is all too common for people not to pay their financial debts, even so there are too many Christians who are not paying their spiritual debts! And just as not paying your worldly debts is a serious problem, even so not paying your spiritual debts is a serious problem, both for you, and for the people who will not hear the gospel.

So what do we need to do to acquire that sense of obligation to share the gospel with others?  
First:

A. Recognize Our Indebtedness to Christ – Paul's debt was first & foremost to God. Though the discharge of the debt was especially *in reference to* the Gentiles, his debt was to Christ. Since He has done so much for us, we are obligated to obey His command to share His gospel with others. Think with me what Christ has done for us:

1. Christ Bought Us – In 1 Cor. 6:19-20 Paul said, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body...." Paul was using an analogy that the people in Rome were very familiar with. It was common for debtors, lawbreakers, and defeated enemies to be sold into slavery. They would be sold at the slave market. Imagine a debtor being sold as a slave. But someone comes along who cares about that person and redeems him, and even sets him free. That freed slave is now a debtor to his benefactor, is he not? Even so, it was as if we were on the auction block, slaves of sin, and the Lord intervened to redeem us. He paid a great price to save us when He shed His blood at Calvary. He was ready & willing to save you and me in spite of the cost. We are now debtors to Christ because we have been bought and paid for by the Savior.

Not only has Christ bought us, but also:

2. Christ Has Blessed Us – Think of all the blessings God has bestowed upon you as a Christian. He has forgiven you, given you eternal life, changed your life, given you hope and a future. He provides for your every need. He has given you a church family where you are loved. And so when we receive blessing from God, we become obligated to pass that blessing on to others. We Christians are debtors by benefits received. We are not to be selfish and keep this wonderful salvation all to ourselves. Furthermore, we American Christians should view ourselves as indebted to God. He has made our nation great, strong, & prosperous. We are indebted to God to use our financial resources to share the gospel with people at home & around the world. Are you discharging your debt to God by giving to support ministries and missionaries that are reaching others for Christ?

So if you are going to be passionate about sharing the gospel, you need to recognize your indebtedness to Christ. Gratitude should motivate us to obey the Great Commission of our Lord to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19-20). Have you accepted your obligation to Christ to tell others about Him? He loves the world, and He wants the world to hear the good news of the salvation He has provided.

Not only should we recognize our indebtedness to Christ, but also, we should:

B. Recognize Our Responsibilities to Others – Though we are ultimately indebted to God, the discharge of our debt involves other people. A literal translation of v.14 could be, “In reference both to the Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise, I am a debtor.” Paul also understand that he had an obligation to help save Gentiles who were lost in sin.

We should recognize the fact that the need of our fellow man obligates us to help them. If I am walking down the street and pass a house on fire, and the family inside is unaware of the situation, do I not have an obligation to help them? Of course I do! We Christians are debtors to all men by our common manhood.

Now notice who is included in our realm of responsibility. Paul says in v.14 that he was indebted “both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.” [Note the parallel statements]. Paul was especially commissioned by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18). He was to share the gospel without discrimination, and without distinction regarding nationality or cultural development. The Greeks considered themselves to be wise and cultured. They viewed people from other nations as uncultured barbarians. Paul was well educated and cultured, but he understood the fact that we are to preach the gospel to all. We are not to refrain from sharing the gospel with someone just because they are different racially, culturally, economically, or in terms of education. Peter gave one reason for this in Acts 10:34. When he realized that God was opening the door of salvation to Gentiles, he said, “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.” So neither should we show partiality. We are indebted to share the gospel with *all* people. You cannot pick and choose to whom you will preach the gospel. We must be willing to cross any barrier to share the gospel with others. For example, “barbarians” were people who did not speak & understand Greek.<sup>1</sup> So Paul is also saying that we are indebted to share the Gospel with other nations. We must go as a missionary or send missionaries to pay our spiritual debt to God. We must cross the language barrier. Perhaps more of us need to learn to speak Spanish. Like it or not, that’s the second most common native tongue spoken in our country.

I hope you understand and accept your obligation to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others, regardless of who they are. Great gratitude should produce great obligation, which in turn should produce a great passion to discharge our obligation to Christ.

Secondly, we should be passionate about sharing the gospel:

## II. FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION

Paul goes on to say in v.16, “for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” The Greek word for “power” is *dunamis*, from which we get our word dynamite. Folks, there is power in the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the Greeks, the Romans were more impressed with power than with reasoned argument. The power of

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<sup>1</sup> The Greeks thought their unintelligible chatter sounded like "bar-bar-bar-bar." Thus, foreigners became known as barbarians (Gk. *barbaros*).

<sup>2</sup> The conception of the gospel as a force pervades the epistles to the Corinthians; its proof, so to speak, is dynamical, not logical. It is demonstrated, not by argument, but by what it does.

the gospel had already been demonstrated, and that power produced victory after victory in the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Now in what ways can we say that the gospel is the power of God? First:

A. There Is Power in the Message of the Gospel - Just share the gospel enough, and in time you will see God's power at work in those who believe. One reason is because this is the Word of the living God. There is power in the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Likewise, 1 Cor. 1:18 says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Furthermore, Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:4, "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Paul did not rely upon human techniques of persuasion to lead people to Christ, but he had confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to use the Word of God to save souls. The power of God is at work in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I remember an early experience I had with the power of the Gospel. While in Bible College we had just finished street preaching and witnessing, and so I began to walk to my car, which was parked about a mile away in the less expensive parking on the edge of downtown. Another young man was walking on the sidewalk with me, and I started a conversation with him. I found out that he was also walking to the same parking area. I began to witness to him. I felt I had a captive audience for the next 10-15 minutes! At first he was not receptive to my witness. But the more I quoted Scripture to him, the more I saw God soften his heart. By the time the walk was over he was very interested in the Gospel. We exchanged phone numbers, and I later found out that he accepted Christ as his Savior!

B. There Is Saving Power in the Gospel – Notice again that v.16 says, "for it is the power of God to salvation." Now this power of God is "unto (*eis*, results in) salvation." The gospel is the omnipotence of God operative unto salvation. God not only wills our salvation, but has the power to save. Man is so lost, so infected by sin, so doomed, and so dead in sin that it takes the power of God to deliver him from all of that. Only God can save me from the consequences of my sins. Only God can bestow a new life, which shall grow up into righteousness and beauty. This salvation only comes through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Why should we be ashamed of the only cure for the sin-sick soul? It's the gospel that tells me I need to be saved. It's the gospel that tells me what God did to make salvation possible. It is the gospel that tells me how to be saved. Paul knew that the gospel was the power of God by his own dramatic regeneration experience and through his work of proclaiming the gospel.

Finally, the gospel is the power of God, for:

C. There Is Life-Changing Power in the Gospel - We cannot change our sin nature. Jer. 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil." However, we can be delivered from the power of sin by the power of the gospel. Once we are born again by believing the gospel, we have the capacity to live right. Romans 8:3 says, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son..." Man is sinful and unable to remedy his condition, but an incredible, limitless power comes from God that can transform lives. Salvation is deliverance from sin to righteousness. This life transformation begins with conversion and regeneration. Get people saved and converted on the inside, and they will change on the outside. I have seen the message of the

cross transform hundreds of people in my lifetime. Let the world say what it will, the evidence is in, and the cross transforms us. We ought to be proud to be able to share such good news!

There is another reason why we should not be ashamed of the gospel. There is another reason why we should be eager to share the gospel:

### III. FOR THE GOSPEL REVEALS HOW WE CAN BE RIGHT WITH GOD

In v.17 Paul tells us that the gospel brings salvation “for in it the righteousness of God is revealed.” The “righteousness of God” is one of the most important concepts in Romans. Some form of this word is found over 60 times in this letter. In the language of the Old Testament, the salvation of God and the righteousness of God are virtually synonymous (Ps. 98:1, 2; Isa. 46:13; Isa. 51:5-8; 56:1; 62:1). There is no salvation apart from becoming right with God.

Are you right with God? Do you know for sure that God will accept you into heaven? What if you died and then stood at heaven’s gate, and God asked you, “Why should I let you into heaven?” What would you say? Can a just & holy God let a sinner into heaven? Our sin must be dealt with. Our sin condemns us, and makes us guilty. We must be made right with God.

Now the first step to becoming right with God is to acknowledge that you are a sinner, and you are not right with God. So I want you to understand that:

A. The Gospel Reveals Man’s Lack of Righteousness – Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” It must be understood that God’s righteousness and man’s righteousness are two utterly different kinds of righteousness. Many think that there is a certain degree of righteousness in man that is acceptable to God. They think that God grades on the curve, and that if a man reaches a certain degree of human righteousness, he will attain heaven. However, the Bible repudiates such a concept. For example, Tit. 3:5 says, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (cf. also Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 4:5). Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags....”

Listen, the righteousness that God demands of man can never be produced by man. And so when a person hears that God demands nothing less than His own righteousness, he may become discouraged and say, “Then no one can be saved.” It’s true that no one is good enough to be saved on their own. But I have good news. What God demands, He provides. So we also see that the gospel not only reveals our lack of righteousness, but:

B. The Gospel Also Reveals God’s Gift of Righteousness – Again, Paul said in v.17 that in the gospel “the righteousness of God is revealed.” Paul explained in Phil. 3:9 that he wanted to “be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.” This righteousness is the status of man resulting from the saving activity of God. The same righteousness that condemns the sinner who rejects salvation saves the one who accepts it! It must also be kept in mind that righteousness to the Hebrew is not so much a moral quality as a legal status.

Folks, it’s good news to know that I can be right with God. I don’t have to worry whether or not I have done enough good works and religious deeds to be saved. I know I am saved because of the promise and gift of God’s righteousness. As we shall see later in the book of Romans, God has imputed the righteousness of Jesus Christ to my account.

Finally, we should be passionate about sharing the gospel of Christ:

#### IV. FOR THE GOSPEL IS SIMPLE

Notice in v.16 that the gospel “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” It’s that simple! Salvation is available for those “who believe.” You don’t have to complete 32 rituals to be saved. You don’t have to keep 600 laws to be saved. Salvation power operates through faith. Paul will place great emphasis in this epistle upon the role of faith in salvation. The English word “believe” is too weak to translate the Greek word. The word speaks of trust & reliance upon the Word of God.

Furthermore, in v.17 Paul says, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;<sup>3</sup> as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Here we come to that great statement, “The just shall live by faith.” This is a quotation from Hab. 2:4. Paul seems to understand this Old Testament verse to mean, “He who is righteous by faith shall live.” It is only by faith that a person becomes just and right in the eyes of God. What is this faith that we are to have? It is faith in a promise, faith in a remedy, faith in the blood of Christ, faith in a physician, faith in a Savior. It is putting our complete trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone.

We trust people all the time. When you go to a restaurant, you probably trust them to serve you food that will be satisfying, and not make you sick! When your wife serves you a meal, you do not question if she has put point in your food. You trust her! Most of you trust your doctor to give you good medical advice. You accept the cure he recommends. We all live by faith. How much more should be trust Jesus Christ, who has proven that He is the Messiah, the Son of God by fulfilled prophecies, and His resurrection from the dead? He has a proven track record of changing lives. Salvation comes only by faith. It’s that simple.

Have you placed your faith in Christ as Savior? Some here today need to be saved. You are still a sinner, and you cannot enter heaven on your own. You need the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Will you receive that gift today? Will you place your faith in Jesus Christ, and repent of your sin? If you are willing to respond to the gospel, come forward this morning and I will gladly talk to your and pray with you, and lead you to receive Christ as your Savior.

Conclusion: The main thrust of my message today has been for believers in Jesus Christ. Too often we act like we are ashamed of the gospel. Too often we are not eager to share the gospel. Perhaps you have lost your passion to share the gospel. May God help us to restore or gain a passion for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Let us remember that we have an obligation to discharge. The burden of a lost world will remain upon us until we share the gospel with every nation, and until every person has had the opportunity to hear the gospel at least once.

One of our Southern Baptist missionaries was Harold Cummins. He went to a very primitive tribe in Kenya, and shared the good news of Jesus, and how they could be saved. He went from hut to hut to talk to people about the Lord. One old man in the village started following him around and offered to introduce him to others in the tribe. At the end of the day he asked the man why it was that he was willing to take his time to work with him, especially since the old man had rejected Christ as his Savior. When he heard the missionary spoke those words, the old man became angry, threw down his spear and said, “Reject Him! You’ve never told me about Him.” Evidently, the missionary had not yet personally & directly witnessed to him about his faith in Christ. Let us not

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<sup>3</sup> Literally it is “out of faith unto faith.” A parallel statement is found in 3:22. It is likely that “from faith to faith” goes with “revealed.” In other words, God does not speak directly to you from heaven, but He comes out of the faith of one heart into the faith of another. One man of faith preaches and another man believes.

assume that people will reject the good news of Jesus Christ. Let us seek to be more like Paul and gain a passionate willingness to share the gospel with all people.<sup>4</sup>

I want to encourage every Christian here today to seek a greater willingness and passion to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. We have an obligation to God to share the gospel. And when you consider the power of the gospel to save souls and make people right with God, we should glory in the gospel. When we consider the simplicity of the gospel, anyone can share it, and anyone can believe. So let us seek to have the same passion about sharing the gospel that Paul had. Think of at least one person you know who needs to hear the gospel. Make a commitment to talk to them this week.

Finally, I also want to call upon some of you to surrender to God's call upon your life to preach the gospel, or become a missionary.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtin Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); John MacArthur, Jr., *Acting on the Good News: Study Notes on Romans 1:1-16* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Wrath of God: Study Notes on Romans 1:16-23* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1982); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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<sup>4</sup> Told by Dr. James Draper in a sermon on Romans 1:14-17.