

Romans 1:16-18 by Wayne Barber

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Romans 1:16-18

Man's Desperation/God's Good News-1

In Ro 1:16-18 we see Man's Desperation for God's Good News: "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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.' For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

One of the traumas of life in the physical realm is when you have a problem but you don't know what that problem is. This is particularly true if you are sick. The doctors run test after test after test and can't seem to come to an answer. The reason it is such a trauma is because, until you know the problem, you can't find the cure. You've got to know the problem. You've got to know what is wrong. When a person cannot come to grips with what the problem is, they can't find a cure that will bring any relief.

In a spiritual sense, we know that the world is sick. All you have to do is read the newspaper or watch television. You can see that the world is sick; not physically, I am talking about spiritually. And we know why. It is because of the sin of Adam, the depravity of man. Romans 5:12-note says "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin."

So we know the problem. The problem is rampant. It is all around us. The symptoms are everywhere. In America three out of every four marriages end in divorce. The drug scene is so far out of reach we will never see it even touched in our lifetime. More babies are killed by abortion every year than there were men who died in World War II. Immorality has not only obsessed our society but it has gotten into the church to the point that it shames us all. Men of stature have fallen because of it. Teenage pregnancy is so bad that some high schools have nurseries so unwed mothers can get their children taken care of while they go to school.

The symptoms are everywhere. People are hurting. The reason is the sinfulness of man. It all started with Adam and has worked generation upon generation upon generation. But the beautiful thing is we have the cure, and that is the good news of God. That is what we have been talking about in the book of Romans. You know, it overwhelms me to know there are a lot of people suffering because they don't know the good news that we know. It has changed us. It set us free from sin and self. At the same time it has

awakened us to how many people around us are desperate for it.

The Apostle Paul in chapter 1 of Romans is trying to get a point across. He is trying to show us the good news that we have received and we must be about sharing with other people. I want us to look at two things. First of all, the cure, which we already know is the good news, and secondly, the cause.

First of all, as we look at the cure that God offers for man's spiritual condition, we look at Ro 1:16, 17-note: "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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation." If I was in a stream, caught in a current, and it was sucking me under and I was reaching out for somebody to rescue me, somebody to free me, somebody to deliver me, that is the word that I would want. The word for salvation, *soteria*, means to rescue. It means to deliver. It means to set free. You are saved from something, but you are also saved to something. So often we think of what we have been taken from but we don't understand what we have been taken into. The word means to rescue, to set free, to deliver.

The word "power," the power of God unto salvation, is the word *dunamis*. That is the word from which we get "dynamic," "dynamo" and "dynamite." Dynamite makes a lot of noise, stirs up a lot of dust, and settles in a hurry. That's what has happened to a lot of people. They talk about their salvation. They talk about a big experience they had 30 years ago—and there is not one single clue of it in their life today. But you see, it is the power of God. It is not the power of man. The good news is I can't save myself. I am sucked into the current of depravity because of Adam and I am reaching out. I cry out, "Somebody help me!" God says, "I will help you." The good news is Jesus did what you could never do. If you will just reach your hand out, Jesus will deliver you out of that miry pit and put your feet on the rock, as Psalm 40 says. He will put a brand new song in your heart. Salvation means that you have been rescued. You have been delivered from sin and from self. No wonder Paul was not ashamed.

The word "ashamed" comes from two Greek words. One is *epi*, which means upon, but it really is an intensifier. The other word is *aischunomai*, which means to be humiliated. "I am not humiliated," Paul says. There is another word for ashamed that you see sometimes. It means you go over and cower in a corner. That is not the word used here. The word used here means I am not humiliated, I am not embarrassed, I am not ashamed to share the good news of God for it is the power of God unto salvation.

One of the things about the Apostle Paul that I love is, he doesn't just talk about it, he lives it out. If you will study his life, from Acts 9 through the last chapter of Acts, you will see he is not ashamed of the good news of God. He would go into the most hostile places you could possibly imagine. As a matter of fact, it is a pattern. On his first missionary journey he went into the synagogue. Now the synagogue is where the Jews taught their religious teachings, but also it was like a community center. The Greeks could come. The Gentiles could come into it. If you wanted the intellectuals, the people who thought, the people who loved to reason with you, you would go to the synagogue. However, it was the most hostile place he could possibly have chosen.

When you look in Acts 13 when he starts his missionary journey, you want to say, "Paul, I have read ahead of you. Don't go in there. There is trouble ahead for you." But he goes right there. In Antioch he goes in and they have a riot and run him out of town. From there he goes over to Iconium. He told Timothy about all the problems he had at Iconium and Derby and Lystra. He talked about the riots that broke out. The people turned against him, but in every place people were being set free by the good news. The religious people hated him but the people who were hurting, the people who were needy were responding to him.

From there he went over to Thessalonica on another missionary journey and when he got there, he started preaching the gospel in the synagogue. Immediately some of them believed but some of them turned against him. They harassed his friends and they had to slip him out of town by night. He went over to Berea, the same thing, except they were more noble-minded. I love that word in the Greek. It means they had more class. They at least looked in the Word to see if what he was saying was right. From Berea he had to be taken out of town because the Jews from Thessalonica who didn't like him followed him over to Berea.

He went down to Athens. At Athens he was not dealing with the Jews. He was just dealing with pagan idolatry and Greek thought. He got up on Mars Hill and began to defend the gospel. He said, "I saw a sign here that reads, 'The Unknown God.' I want to tell you, He is not unknown anymore. I can tell you about Him. You can know Him. Jesus Christ is the good news of what you call the Unknown God."

He went to Corinth and then to Ephesus. But whether he was in Ephesus or Jerusalem or Corinth or Athens you see something about him: he was not ashamed. He was not humiliated with the good news of God. It is the power of God unto salvation.

What is wrong with us? We don't want to tell our neighbors about Him. We don't want to share Him with the people we work with. Every day we come in contact with people who are in bondage to sin and self. Can we say with Paul, "I am not ashamed"? He was changed by the good news. Because of that, he lived his life paying a debt that he felt he owed to his fellowman, to make sure they could be changed by that same good news.

In Ro 1:17-note there is something else that is in the gospel. It says, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" I would love to ask you what you think righteousness is. What does it mean, the righteousness of God? The Greek word is *dikaioisune*. The little *sune* on the end of it means it is not quite what you think. It refers to the character of God. God is a righteous God. When you think of righteousness, think of right conduct. Righteousness = right conduct. Whenever you hear "righteousness," God is right in Himself. He is inherently righteous. Therefore, whatever He does is righteousness. It conforms to the standard of His character.

But now wait a minute. It is not just talking about the character of God alone. What does he mean? "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." What are we saying? Well, the righteousness of God involves three things. The first two are not good. You don't understand how good the news is until you understand the bad part. You have to see yourself as being lost and desperate before you see how good the news is.

The first thing it involves is a standard of right conduct that God demands and commands of every person. He has a right to do it because that is who He is. He does not fellowship with unrighteousness. That is bad news in a sense. The Law was given in the Old Testament to show man he could never measure up to that right conduct. "I have been going to church for years. I have given money to everything. I put in pews. I've been an usher and I have worked in the parking lot. You mean to tell me all those good things do not somehow qualify me?" That is exactly right. Because not only is it a standard of right conduct God commands, it is a standard of right conduct God alone can approve.

You see, man has been approving his own righteousness for years. We call that religion. Man says, "If I go to church, if I do this, if I do that, that will make me good." No, sir. Isaiah 64:6 says that my righteousness is filthy rags in God's eyes. That is a nice way of saying what the Hebrew word really says. "My righteousness! My right conduct! You mean to tell me I can do all these good things and it is condemned by the Law because it doesn't meet the standard of God that He requires?" That is exactly right.

Where is the good news? The good news is that righteousness is also that which God provides. He imputes it to those who receive His Son, Jesus Christ. It is not what we have done. It is what Jesus does, what He did and what He will continue to do in our life. That is the good news. If you died today, on what basis would you tell the Father that you have inherited eternal life? On what basis? That you are a church member? Heavens, no. What is it then? It has to be that which was given and provided and imputed into your life when Jesus Christ came to live in you, when you received Him into your life. That measures up to the standard. Not only does it measure to the standard, it enables you from now on to measure to the standard as you obey Him. Christ in you strengthens you in the inner man so that you can live a life that measures to what God requires. Unbelievable! That is good news!

Paul said in Ro 1:17-note, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" That phrase "the righteous man shall live by faith" is from Habakkuk. I believe what he means is "from faith to faith." He doesn't mean every time somebody is saved, although that is certainly implied. What he means is, the righteousness we are talking about here not only starts with Christ, it continues with Christ and will always be in Christ. It is by faith. In other words, when I learn to trust Him and bow before Him, the righteousness of God then can be revealed.

What is righteousness? Righteousness is not what I do. It is what God does in and through me as I am willing to submit to Him. From faith to faith, a righteous man lives by his faith. What shows the good news to the world? It is the way we live, surrendered and obedient to Christ, Him producing that right conduct in us that measures to His standard and puts a mark on the fact that He must be living in us for no man can live that way apart from Him.

So it is from faith to faith, the righteous man shall live by his faith. The gospel is not just for the lost. Do you know why? Because there are a lot of people sitting in church who have been saved by grace but for some reason they think they are kept by the Law. That was the problem Paul was dealing with. The legalists came in and said, "Yeah, we are saved by grace, but you had better wear your hair a certain way, dress a certain way, keep these laws." You see, some person's standards is what keeps you. No sir. You don't separate yourself. God separates you as you obey Him. He changes your behavior from day to day from within, not from without. So, Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

This is the cure. Do you need some help? Come to Jesus. Jesus Christ is the cure, the good news of what He has done for you, what He wants to do to you, what He wants to do in you and what He wants to do through you is the cure for what you are looking for. Is your family falling apart? Could it be because one of you has rejected Jesus Christ and what He says is righteous and what He wants to do in your life? You see, the cure to the ills of society is found in the good news of Jesus Christ. The cure is the good news.

Let's look at the cause then, since we know what it is. Let's look and see how Paul brings this out. In verse 18 he brings out the cause. He says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." First of all, what is the wrath of God? There are two words for wrath in scripture that we have to get a handle on. One is the word *orge*. What does that mean? That is intensified, progressive, growing wrath or anger. In other words, it is getting worse. The wrath of God is building.

Let me give you an example of that. I went to church the other night by way of the interstate. I tried to get on the interstate at the ramp, but the cars wouldn't let me on. This one driver wouldn't let me on. I tried to move over, but he wouldn't let me on. There wasn't anybody on the other side of him. I was saying, "Come on, man, move over." The anger has begun!

I was riding along looking for a place to get over in that left lane. They wouldn't slow down and they wouldn't let me over. I was going up the hill and they wouldn't let me over. I am looking, I am looking, I am looking. All of a sudden I get over, and the guy behind me started honking his horn. The anger, the anger is building. It is building. It is getting progressively worse!

I got to the top of the hill. Oh, there were five trucks lined up behind each other trying to get up the hill. Two of them pulled out in front of me tried to pass! Everybody slammed on their brakes. The anger is building!!! I am about to explode!

Now that is exactly the word for "wrath" that we see here. The wrath is being revealed. It is present tense. It has been being revealed for a long time. "Are you telling me God has been trying to send the message to this planet for a long time that He is not pleased with ungodliness and unrighteousness?" That is exactly what I am saying. That is exactly what Paul is saying. People, open your eyes and make the connection. God is sending a message to us and has been doing that since the book of Genesis. It is getting progressively worse. Thank God for His long-suffering character. Thank God that His anger can take a lot more than ours can. But it is coming to a boiling point. He is the only perfect God, therefore He is the only One who is qualified to judge anybody because when it is His wrath. It is not vengeful like ours. It is just. A just God says, "My anger has been being revealed from the beginning of time."

There is another word for "wrath" that is going to explode one day. In the book of Revelation, when you get to the bowl judgments, the word is thumos. That means exploded anger. It has finally burst. It has finally fallen. God said, "That is it. That is it. Enough is enough." That is when the bowl judgments fall, right before He comes to this earth, having rid all unrighteousness and sin, and begins to establish His kingdom.

There are two words you need to understand. The word "ungodliness" is one. What does it mean? It means irreverence. Because of the depravity of man caused by Adam it is an irreverent look towards God. Man does not want God in his business. Man will do anything to get away from God. "God, I don't want you. I can work it out myself." "Unrighteousness" is wrong conduct that always comes from an irreverent attitude. That is what angers the heart of God. The wrath has been revealed. Where is it being revealed from? It is being revealed from heaven.

Now I don't know what all that means, but I have an idea. In Genesis 7, something was revealed from heaven, the wrath of God, when He judged the world by the flood. It rained for 40 days. It covered the whole world. Where do you find Noah after the Ark had come to rest? You find him drunk. Has it changed the heart of man any? No. But God has to keep man alive. Why? Because He has a man by the name of Abraham who He is going to pull forth from the Babylonians of that time. He is going to bring him forth and say, "Abraham, in you I want to make a covenant and through you will come a land and a nation and a seed." Galatians says the seed is Jesus Christ.

It is good news! It started way back there. So amidst the wrath there has also been the grace and the mercy of God running on parallel tracks. At Sodom and Gomorrah, with the fire and brimstone that fell from heaven, God revealed something of the wrath. In the Old Testament, when you had famine, it was always because something was wrong in the land.

The secular world says we have had more natural disasters in the last five years than we have in the history of man. There have been more earthquakes in the last couple of years than we have had in the last 40 years! Folks, wake up and make the connection! God's wrath has been being revealed since Genesis and it is intensifying! Can't you sense it? God says, "I am angry and I've got a right to be angry! I have been revealing my wrath from time to time to time."

You had better pay attention to what the Word is saying. We have already seen the legitimacy of this book. Eight prophecies alone would have been incredible for a man to fulfill, much less the almost 400 prophecies concerning Jesus Christ!

We have to wake up. God says, "I am angry at irreverence and wrong conduct and I have been revealing my wrath from the beginning since man sinned. It is intensifying. And the day is coming near." Thank God we have the good news to get out as fast as we possibly can. The good news is that which He has done in Jesus Christ. You can escape the wrath if you receive the Lamb. You've got a choice. The Psalmist said, "Who has known the wrath of God?" No one except Jesus. He took the full wrath of God upon Himself, having lived up and fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law. He was a man who did what no other man could do. He fulfilled the Law. Therefore, He qualified to be the perfect sacrifice. Then He took on Himself all of our sin and became the propitiation for our sin. The word means satisfaction. It is the word used for mercy seat.

Do you know what the mercy seat was? The ark of the covenant sat there in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Inside that ark were the Ten Commandments that condemned every one of us. But on top of the ark was a piece of gold covering called the mercy seat.

Two angels were overlooking it. When the High Priest would walk in, he would take the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the mercy seat. God said, "I will meet you right there."

Paul says in Romans 3:25-note Jesus is our mercy seat (hilasterion - word study). Through Him our sins have been remitted and through Him we have fellowship with the Father for all eternity. Good news, good news. Are you ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you humiliated when somebody finds out that you are a Christian? Are you humiliated when somebody is doing something on the sly and you want to laugh along with them because you don't want to appear to be odd? Do you, by your behavior, condone the very things they are doing? Romans 1 will be an eye-opener to you. At the very last of the chapter it says, they not only know that the things that the people do are wrong, they condone it and they put their stamp of approval upon it. A lot of times we do that by just refusing to understand what God has done in our own hearts.

Man is desperate for the good news of Jesus Christ. Do you know what I found? Paul says in verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." There have been generations of it. "Suppress" is present tense. They have been suppressing it for generations. The word means to push it down, squelch it out, to cut it out.

For generations man has layered over the problem trying to hide the truth of God, what He has done, who He is and what He requires. Now society is starving to death. They are hurting, but they can't seem to get to the hurt. Why? Because man has so suppressed the truth, that we have become the irritant. But we know the truth and the more we go out and are willing to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more that is eroded and then the more we can get to the real source of the problem, the real cause.

Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ." I just have to ask you one question. Have you been changed by the good news? You may answer, "Not really. I have joined the church." You haven't been changed yet. You don't know what we are talking about. Quit calling yourself a believer if you haven't been changed by the good news. That is what the good news is, that which changes and transforms a person.

Once you are changed, you have something with you that is so valuable everywhere you go, everybody around you is desperate for it. What I have found is, the more you share it, the more it is going to have to accommodate your life to the people you have shared it with. Because they are going to want more and they are going to want to grow. It is going to invade your privacy. It is going to invade your schedule. But that is part of it, isn't it? It is not only sharing it with them, but helping them understand it and nurturing them along.

How many people in your family are held hostage by their sin and their self? They are desperate. Well, you have the cure. You know the cause and once you share it, get ready because your life is about to take on a new dimension than you have ever had before.