

Dear listeners, I'm sure you will agree that hearing good news is a wonderful thing and certainly not something to be ashamed of. You would not be ashamed to hear that you did well on an exam or that your boss gave you a raise.

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:16 that he is not **ashamed** of the gospel. This implies that it is possible to be ashamed of the gospel, but the word gospel means "good news" or "glad tidings," so why then would Paul write this? What pressure was Paul facing that would make him write this?

The fact is, that the good news, which Paul was preaching, was radically different from any religious or philosophical message of his day. Paul preached a crucified Messiah – a crucified Saviour. To the Romans this was madness: you don't crucify your own God! And you certainly don't pray exclusively to only one God! The Romans prayed to many gods, and for this reason they branded Christianity as a kind of atheism.

One the other hand, the Jews in Paul's day (who were his own people) by and large also opposed his message of a crucified Saviour. All in all, this means that Paul faced a lot of opposition as he preached the gospel, but still he says that he is not ashamed of the gospel. And the reason he was not ashamed of the gospel is that he was fully convinced that it really was good news! He writes that the gospel is the "*power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*"

The reason this is good news is that we all need salvation. The question is: what does that mean?

I'm sure you will agree that life on earth is not easy. In fact, it's an **understatement** to say life is not easy. Life can be very difficult. If you pay attention to the news you will know that there are terrible things happening in many places and in the lives of many people. There is poverty, war, violence and bloodshed in many places.

And while we live quite peacefully in Canada, we still experience the effects of a broken world: people lie and cheat and steal; marriages and families break up; and our jails are full. We live in a world that is far from perfect!

Many people today will tell you that the answer to these problems is education. Others will argue that we need to invest more money into social programs. Still others believe that the answer to these problems is tolerance and equality.

The difficulty with these proposed solutions, however, is that they have all been tried and they have failed. Education and money cannot prevent war and violence. A philosophy of tolerance and equality does not make people happy, because there can never be enough tolerance or equality to make everyone happy.

At the same time, there are many who claim that Christianity is not the solution either. The Christian religion has existed for about 2000 years, and yet, you could say, the world has not become a better place.

The truth of the matter is, however, that Jesus Christ never promised to make our life on this earth free from suffering and pain. He never promised that all war and strife would cease. In fact, he even said that until he comes again there will be wars, and rumours of wars, and famines and earthquakes in various places (Mt. 24:3ff).

So what then is the good news that Paul is talking about in Romans 1:16? Why is the gospel of Jesus Christ, *good news*? The reason the gospel is good news is that it addresses the heart of our problem.

You see, poverty and war and lying and cheating and the failure of marriage are all symptoms of a much deeper problem. The deepest problem of humankind is to have a lack of peace in our hearts. And when our hearts are not at peace then our hearts produce all kinds of envy, and jealousy, and anger, and even hateful and murderous thoughts (as Jesus says in Mt. 15:19).

“Where does that lack of peace come from?” you ask. The absence of peace in our hearts is the result of our alienation from God. God created Adam and Eve as human beings who were able to love him and worship him. But Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and the consequence of that was that they were alienated from God. The *further* consequence was that all of their children also became rebels and are naturally alienated from God. And this alienation results in the absence of peace in our hearts.

People who are alienated from God do not have peace with God and have no peace in their hearts. And so the deepest problem of humankind is when we are not at peace with God. Our greatest need is to have peace with God. And that is really what the message of the gospel is all about. And that is why the gospel is such good news and that is why Paul, in spite of all the opposition he faced, was not ashamed of the gospel. He knew that the gospel answers our deepest need.

In other words, the gospel is the means by which men and women, boys and girls, who are naturally separated from God, can have peace with God through Jesus Christ. Paul writes that the gospel is the power of God for salvation **TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES!**

This is the same message that was brought by the angels who sang when Christ was born: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace **AMONG THOSE WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED!**” (Luke 2:14)

You see, the message is this: peace comes to those who believe in Christ. The peace of God comes to those with whom God is pleased. And God is pleased with those who believe in Christ.

If you believe in Jesus, and you trust him to forgive your sins, and you trust him to make things right between you and God, then you will have peace in your heart. If you trust in Jesus you will have the peace of knowing that things are good between you and God. The Bible says that Christ suffered, as the righteous for the unrighteous, **that HE might bring us to God** (1 Peter 3:18).

You see, dear listeners, we cannot bring ourselves to God. We cannot obtain peace with God through our own efforts. The gospel is not a philosophy, which if we live according to it we will gain or earn something for ourselves; but it is the good news that God secures salvation for us in and through his Son Jesus Christ.

And so peace with God has nothing to do with outward appearances. We cannot have pride in what we do and see and experience and touch. We cannot regard our religious achievements to be of any value toward peace with God. We can never regard ourselves as something special, because then what Christ has done becomes irrelevant.

What hope is there for us if we have to rely on the prayers of a pastor or priest? What hope is there for us if we have to rely on our own prayers or on the faithfulness with which we attend church or bible study? What hope is there for reconciliation with God for those who put their hope in religious practice or philosophy?

If that is where you pin your hope you lost – you are lost unless you pin your hope on the righteousness of God that is yours by faith in Christ. He is our only hope for reconciliation: *“God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (II Cor. 5:21).

Note well that the bible doesn't simply say that God has stopped counting our sins. God does count our sins, and he certainly does not ignore sin. He does not overlook sin. Scripture says, *“It is appointed unto man once to die and then comes the judgment”* (Heb. 9:27). But if you believe and trust in Jesus Christ, then God will no longer count your sins against you, **because** he counts them against Christ.

And this is the substance and content of the gospel: our righteousness is not to be found in ourselves. Our righteousness is from God and God alone. The good news is that if you believe in Jesus your sins are credited to Christ's account, and Christ's righteousness is credited to your account! No wonder the apostle Paul was not ashamed of this message! Thank you for listening.