

Lesson 14 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 1:15

Romans 1:15 — So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

The first word in verse 15 connects us back to verse 14 and helps us answer our remaining question about verse 14 from last week — why did Paul say that *here*? Why did Paul tell us in verse 14 about the Greeks, the barbarians, the wise, and the foolish?

And the answer we find in verse 15 is that verse 14 explains why Paul was so eager to preach the gospel *in Rome* — he had an obligation to preach the gospel to every different kind of person on earth!

However you describe someone, Paul had an obligation to proclaim the gospel to that person. Greek speaking? Yes! Non-Greek speaking? Yes! Wise? Yes! Foolish? Yes! And any other description we could come up with.

Paul's obligation was to proclaim the gospel to every creature under heaven (Colossians 1:23), and so, no matter how you want to describe someone, Paul still had an obligation to proclaim the gospel to that person.

And where better to do that than in the city of Rome? Rome was the cosmopolitan center of the world! Paul would have encountered every different sort of person in the world on the streets of Rome. When it came to a missionary, there could be no more challenging or exciting city than the city of Rome.

And I think that is what Paul is telling us here — “I am **eager** to preach the gospel to you also who are **in Rome**.”

And perhaps verse 15 helps us with the question we had about the pronoun “you” back in verse 13. Here in verse 15 it seems that “you” is not limited to those already in the church but rather includes everyone in Rome who needs to hear the gospel — which verse 14 tells us is everyone in Rome! And so perhaps verse 15 provides some additional evidence that the harvest Paul wanted to reap back in verse 13 was the harvest that would come from preaching the gospel to everyone in Rome.

But wait a minute, Paul. Do you remember where you are going? You are going to Rome, the ultra-sophisticated center of the known world. And that message you want to proclaim in Rome? Are you really sure you want to do that? After all, some of those Romans might laugh at you when you ask them to bow down before a criminal who was executed by the Roman state in some far-flung province at the edge of the world. Are you sure you want to do this, Paul?

Paul answers that question in the next verse, which is one of the most wonderful verses, not just in Romans, but in the entire Bible!

Romans 1:16

Romans 1:16 — 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.

As you probably know by now, I like to study the Bible by reading a verse and then listing every single question that I have about that

verse. But that first step is not the ending point; it is the starting point. Coming up with questions is easy! The hard part is answering those questions!

And, as we answer those questions, we almost always come up with some more questions that we did not initially see. And, yes, that process can take a while, but I think it is the best way to study the Bible — or anything else for that matter. In fact, I don't know any other way to study the Bible if our goal is to understand it.

And, so, following that procedure, what are our initial questions about verse 16? Well, here is my list.

- **(Question #1)** How does the word “for” at the beginning of verse 16 connect this verse to the preceding verses?
- **(Question #2)** Why did Paul tell us that he was not ashamed of the gospel?
- **(Question #3)** Why was it that Paul was not ashamed of the gospel?
- **(Question #4)** How is the gospel the power of God for salvation?
- **(Question #5)** We came up with a working definition of “gospel” earlier. Do we need to modify that definition after reading verse 16?
- **(Question #6)** Who is included in “everyone who believes”? What does it mean to believe? How is belief related to faith (which is mentioned three times in the next verse)?

- **(Question #7)** Why does Paul mention the Jews and the Gentiles separately?
- **(Question #8)** Why does Paul list the Jews and the Gentiles in that specific order?
- **(Question #9)** Is verse 16 the theme of the entire letter?

Let's start with the first question on that list:

Question #1: How does the word “for” at the beginning of verse 16 connect this verse to the preceding verses?

Paul does not just say, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Instead, Paul says, “**For** I am not ashamed of the gospel.” What that means is that verse 16 is an explanation of something he said before.

And we know what he said before verse 16 — Paul just told us in verse 15 that he was eager to preach the gospel in Rome. And Paul just told us in verse 14 that his obligation was to preach Christ to all people — no matter how you describe them: Greek vs. barbarian, or wise vs foolish.

And, yes, Paul was **eager** to do that. Why? Verse 16 tells us why. Paul was eager to preach the gospel because he was not ashamed of the gospel and because he knew that the gospel was God's power to save. And that first reason leads us to our next question.

Question #2: Why did Paul tell us he was not ashamed of the gospel?

Before we look at what Paul said here, let's first look at why he said it this way. After all, it does sound a bit defensive: "I am not ashamed of the gospel."

Why did he say it that way? We know that Paul could have said this same thing differently because Paul did that in his other epistles.

Ephesians 6:19 — And also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth **boldly** to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 — But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had **boldness** in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

No one who boldly proclaims something is ashamed of what he is proclaiming, and so here in Romans 1:16 it seems that Paul could have made the same point by instead saying, "I boldly proclaim the gospel," as he says elsewhere. But instead he says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." Why?

And let's remember something very important about Paul's obligation to preach the gospel.

Acts 9:15 — But the Lord said to him (Ananias), "Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles **and kings** and the children of Israel.

Did you catch it? "And kings!" Paul's obligation included an obligation from Christ to proclaim truth to power! Paul's obligation to proclaim the gospel included the obligation to proclaim it to kings! And we know that Paul did that because we see him doing it in the book

of Acts. And if Paul, the Roman citizen, ever did find himself in front of Nero, then I am certain that Nero heard at least one gospel sermon during his evil life.

And how does someone proclaim truth to power? There is only one way to do that — with boldness! And we know that is how Paul did it. But Paul does not say that here — he does not say, “I proclaim the gospel with boldness.” Instead, Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Why?

I think we can answer that question with a single word — **Rome**. We need to look at this situation from Paul’s perspective of wanting to visit the city of Rome, a city in which he had never yet set foot.

Yes, Paul just claimed that he was eager to preach the gospel in Rome, but I have a question for Paul about that claim of his:

Is that really true, Paul? Remember, Paul, Rome is a very sophisticated city. Yes, you were born in Tarsus, which is no mean city, but you can’t compare Tarsus with Rome! In Rome, you will meet people who are rich and famous. In Rome, you will meet the most powerful people in the world. In Rome, you will meet the world’s greatest philosophers. In Rome, you will meet the wisest people in the world. And what are you planning on telling them, Paul? That they should all bow down and worship a criminal who was executed by Rome in a foreign land 1500 miles away? That this criminal died for them? That they are saved by his blood? That this criminal has a kingdom, and that they need to be immersed in water to enter his kingdom? And that he is not really dead despite being crucified, but that he lives in heaven and is coming back again someday? Really?

What do we think Rome had to say about that message? I think we know what Rome had to say because we are still hearing it today. What Rome said in the first century is the same as what media mogul Ted Turner said in our own day when he received the Humanist of the Year Award:

“If you really accept the Bible for what it says - the New Testament at any rate, the way it is generally interpreted by most people who believe it - then everybody is going to hell...This life doesn’t count for much of anything. It’s just a transitory testing ground to see if you’re going to measure up to make it to heaven...He had to come down here and suffer and die on the cross, so with His blood our sins could be washed away...weird, man, I’m telling you.”

And, of course, Ted Turner also famously referred to Christianity as a religion for losers. And, believe me, Ted is not alone. Many in the world today agree with him, and many have agreed with him throughout history. We can be sure that Rome agreed with Ted Turner. “Weird, man, I’m telling you.”

And we know that Paul frequently encountered that very attitude because Paul told us about it elsewhere.

1 Corinthians 1:18-24 — For the word of the cross is **folly** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power** of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the **folly** of what we

preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and **folly** to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the **power** of God and the wisdom of God.

Did you notice the key words there? Folly and power? We see those same two key words right here in these verses from Romans 1 — “foolish” in verse 14, and “power” in verse 16.

Christ crucified was folly to the Gentiles. That is what Paul just told us in 1 Corinthians. The Greek word translated “folly” is “*moria*,” from which we get our English word “moron.” The Greek word means absurdity, nonsense, stupidity — not just something that is unconvincing, but something that is intellectually contemptible. And that is how the Greeks viewed the message of Christ crucified.

And if someone had ever wanted to very quickly establish the truth of that proposition about the Greeks, Rome would have been the very best place to go and do that.

Christ crucified? To stand in the streets of Rome and proclaim that a crucified Jew was the Lord of all was a contradiction of everything that Rome believed. To any Roman, the cross was the ultimate depiction of defeat, shame, humiliation, and weakness. Cicero, the great Roman philosopher, said that the mere mention of the cross was unworthy of a Roman citizen.

I suspect that the most common reaction to Paul’s proclamation of the gospel in Rome was laughter. And, again, we know that laughter was the reaction that Paul got elsewhere:

Acts 17:18 — Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this **babbler** wish to say?”

Acts 17:32 — Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some **mocked**.

So, let me ask you again, Paul:

Are you really saying that you are **eager** for all of that? That you are **eager** to preach Christ crucified to the rich, the famous, the wise, and the powerful in Rome? That you are **eager** to tell them that there is one God, that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, that Jesus was crucified, that Jesus rose from the grave, and that Jesus is now King of kings and Lord of lords, ruling over the mighty Roman empire from the throne of the Jewish King David? Really? You’re eager?

And the answer from Paul is? Yes! Paul was eager to do just that! Why? Listen again as Paul tells us why: “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.**” That’s why!

Let the entire world heap ridicule and laughter on the Apostle Paul, and it would not make one bit of difference. Paul would still be eager to preach the gospel to all of them. Yes, it is Paul’s obligation — but Paul does not do it grudgingly — Paul does it with eagerness!

And, of course, here comes the inevitable uncomfortable question: is that me?

Do I respond to ridicule and laughter the way Paul did? Or do I back down immediately when the eyes start to roll? Or, worse, do I keep

my mouth shut for fear of seeing those rolling eyes in the first place? Do I shrink back for fear of hearing the ridicule — “Just another ignorant fundamentalist Bible thumper! He is probably one of those flat-earthers!”

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. Am I? Are you?

I am reminded of one of my favorite songs from Brother Tillit S. Teddlie, which is shown on the Handout for Lesson 14 — *May This My Glory Be!*

Jesus, and shall it ever be? A mortal man ashamed of thee. Ashamed of thee, whom angels praise, whose glories shine through endless days.

Ashamed of Jesus! Sooner far, let evening blush to own a star; He sheds the beams of light divine o'er this benighted soul of mine.

Ashamed of Jesus! Yes, I may, when I've no guilt to wash away: no tears to wipe, no good to crave, no tears to quell, no soul to save.

Till then, nor is my boasting vain, till then I boast a Savior slain; and O, may this my glory be, that Christ is not ashamed of me.

I wish we sang more songs like that one!

Question #3: Why was it that Paul was not ashamed of the gospel?

We know that Paul was not ashamed of the gospel, but we haven't yet looked at why he was not ashamed of the gospel. What was that reason? Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel?

Paul answers that question in verse 16: Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because Paul knew that the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

And I think it is important for us to make careful note of that reason. Why? Because there are other reasons why we might not be ashamed of the gospel, but these other reasons are not the right reason. Paul gives us the right reason in verse 16. What are some of those wrong reasons?

- I am not ashamed of the gospel because I never proclaim it to anyone who might ridicule me. If they might laugh at me, I just keep my mouth shut. As long as I preach the gospel only to the choir, I am never ashamed of it.
- I am not ashamed of the gospel because I proclaim it only here in this building, where it is very safe to do so. No one ever laughs at me in here.
- I am not ashamed of the gospel because I have all of my debate points lined up and ready to go! I know how to argue; I know how to debate. You laugh at me, and you’ll regret it!
- I am not ashamed of the gospel because the gospel I preach is so watered down that it could not possibly offend anyone. Who laughs at a self-help book? Who laughs at a motivational speaker?

- I am not ashamed of the gospel because if anyone laughs at me, that just means they are going to Hell — and so I will have the last laugh!
- I am not ashamed of the gospel because I proclaim it only anonymously on the Internet. They might be laughing, but I never hear it because that's the only way I ever proclaim it.
- I am not ashamed of the gospel because I have learned how to very quickly and artfully change the subject before the laughter can begin.
- I am not ashamed of the gospel because I don't ever proclaim it — that is the preacher's job!

Did any of those reasons ring a bell for you? Some of them did for me.

And so, yes, there are some other reasons why I might not be ashamed of the gospel, but those other reasons are wrong reasons. The right reason is the reason Paul gives us here in verse 16:

“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.”

Question #4: How is the gospel the power of God for salvation?

We looked at this question during our introduction, but let's briefly review what we said. Back in Lesson 7, we said that one of the benefits we will get from our study of Romans is a deeper understanding of the power of the gospel.

And we asked ourselves a question: What if Christ had never come? Paul answers that question for us — without Christ's resurrection, our faith would be futile and we would still be in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).

But then we had another question: if God can do anything, then why can't God just save everybody? Why does God need the power of the gospel to do that?

As we saw, the answer is that the Bible tells us that God cannot do everything. There is something that is impossible for God to do — **it is impossible for God to lie** (Hebrews 6:18). And because God has declared that evil cannot dwell with him, we sinners have a seemingly insurmountable problem: how can God ever allow us into his presence for all eternity?

And the answer? **The gospel is the answer.** The gospel gives God the power to do what would otherwise be impossible even for God — to welcome sinners into his presence while remaining true to his holy nature. The gospel is how God can do that. The gospel is God's power to do that.

Yes, we have a problem, but the gospel is the solution to that problem. But we can say more than that: The gospel is the **only** solution to that problem. If God could have saved us apart from the gospel of Christ, then why did Jesus die on that cross? If there is a pathway to God that bypasses the cross, then Jesus died for no reason — and Jesus would be a liar.

John 14:6 — Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The gospel of Christ is the only path to God the Father. Jesus is not just a way — Jesus is the way. There is no other way.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation.

That sounds like one of those statements that we might be tempted to think is believed by all who claim to be a Christian. But if we thought that, we would be wrong. Many, and perhaps most, professed Christians today do not believe that statement about the gospel.

Why do I say that? I say that because I have read what they say they believe, and what they believe is very different from what Romans 1:16 teaches — and I am talking now about the followers of John Calvin.

Calvinists teach that man is so depraved that he cannot believe the gospel until he is first regenerated by a direct work of the Holy Spirit. Listen as I read from one of the foundational documents of Calvinism:

- **Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 10 (1646)** — “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ ... This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, **who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.**”

And let me also read the same viewpoint from a modern commentary:

- **R.C. Sproul** — “A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: ‘Regeneration precedes faith.’ Our nature is so corrupt, the power of sin is so great, that unless God does a supernatural work in our souls we will never choose Christ. We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order that we may believe.” (*Chosen by God*, 72–73)

Did you hear it? “Unless God does a supernatural work in our souls we will never choose Christ,” and “regeneration precedes faith.”

If that is true, then what is God’s power for salvation? Is it what Paul says — the gospel that we hear and that we obey — or is it what Calvin says — the supernatural work in our souls done by the Holy Spirit? **I am going to go with what Paul says!**

And we can turn to Acts 2 for confirmation. What led those who were saved in Acts 2 to believe in God and obey the gospel? Was it what they heard? Or was it some sort of direct work of the Holy Spirit? Let’s read and see:

“Now when the elect among them had the Holy Spirit regenerate their hearts so that they were now supernaturally enabled to believe the gospel and to choose Christ, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’

Is that what the Bible says? **No, it is not!** Let’s read what the Bible says:

Acts 2:37-38 — Now when they **heard** this they were **cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the **forgiveness** of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the **Holy Spirit**.

What is the order in those verses? First, they heard. Second, they believed — they were cut to the heart by what they heard. Third, they were told to repent and be baptized. Fourth, those who obeyed were saved and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2, hearing came first. They heard the gospel, and they were saved when they obeyed the gospel that they had heard. And that makes perfect sense. Why? **Because the gospel is the power of God for salvation!**

Acts 2 is enough to show that Calvinism is wrong. But we can say more than that. Calvinism is not just wrong; Calvinism is evil. And yes, that is a strong statement. But I don't know any other way to describe a system of belief that charges God of evil — and that is exactly what Calvinism does.

But how does Calvinism charge God of evil? Earlier I read a portion of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which is a cornerstone document of Calvinism. Let me now read the paragraph that follows the paragraph I read a moment ago.

- **Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 10 (1646)** — “**Elect infants**, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when, and where, and how He pleases.”

You may be wondering whether you heard that right! Well, you did! “Elect infants, dying in infancy.” According to Calvin, those elect infants are just fine. **But what about the other infants?** What about the non-elect infants who die in infancy? Let’s let Calvin himself answer that question:

“By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. **All are not created on equal terms**, but some are preordained to eternal life, **others to eternal damnation**; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.”
(*Institutes*, 3.21.5)

That’s the elect and the non-elect — the elect are preordained to eternal life, the non-elect to eternal damnation.

And so, connecting all the dots, what does Calvin teach about those non-elect infants who die in infancy? Calvin teaches that God preordained them all to eternal damnation.

Now, if that is not an evil doctrine that accuses God of evil, then no doctrine could ever be described that way. Calvin taught that some babies are born simply to die in infancy and then go straight to Hell because they are not elect babies. We just read it from their own documents. That is what they teach.

And, yes, some of them might say, “I’m a Calvinist, but I don’t believe that!” But that is like someone saying, “I believe in addition, but I certainly don’t think $1 + 1$ equals 2 !” Try as you might, you cannot escape the logical conclusions of your beliefs!

That is what John Calvin taught. But what did Jesus teach?

Luke 18:15-17 — Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, **for to such belongs the kingdom of God.** Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God **like a child** shall not enter it.”

Calvinism is both evil and popular, but I think if more people took the time to understand what Calvinism teaches it would not be nearly as popular. And that's on us. We need to be teaching people the truth about Calvinism loudly, boldly, and frequently. If we don't, who will?

And I can promise you one thing for sure — that will not be our final comment about Calvinism in this class on Romans!

Question #5: We came up with a working definition of “gospel” earlier. Do we need to modify that definition after reading verse 16?

When we first encountered the word “gospel” back in verse 1, we came up with a proposed working definition of the term. Now that we have read verse 16, I think we should circle back and make sure we are still happy with our working definition.

And, of course, our plan is to do that with all of the key words in Romans. We need to keep checking ourselves to make sure that our understanding of those key words agrees with all that the Bible tells us about them.

So, to review, what is our current working definition of the gospel? Here is what we said back in Lesson 8: **The gospel is everything the**

Bible tells us about Jesus. Under that definition, the gospel includes all of the New Testament and **much** of the Old Testament. In short, the good news is everything the Bible tells us about Jesus!

But is all of that the power of God for salvation? Shouldn't we perhaps narrow our focus down in verse 16 to just what the Bible tells us about the cross?

No. In fact, I don't think it is possible to separate what the Bible tells us about Jesus into one part that is related to the cross and another part that is not related to the cross. **Everything the Bible tells us about Jesus is related to the cross.**

- We see the cross in the opening chapters of the Bible (Genesis 3:15).
- We see the cross in the great promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3).
- We see the cross in the Psalms (Psalm 22).
- We see the cross in the prophets (Isaiah 53).
- We see the cross in Jesus' reason for coming to this world (Luke 19:10).

The cross is why Jesus came — the cross is why Jesus is the promised blessing — the cross is how Jesus came to seek and save the lost!

The gospel is everything the Bible tells us about Jesus. And from beginning to end, what the Bible tells us about Jesus is that he came to die on a cross so that we might all have life eternal.

That is the gospel of Christ, and the Bible proclaims that gospel from Genesis to Revelation. That gospel is the power of God for salvation, and that gospel is all that the Bible tells us about Christ. I don't think we need to make any changes to our working definition of the gospel, at least not yet.