

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Unashamed: The Power of the Gospel

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Series: The Verdict
Romans 1:7-17

**BIG IDEA - MOVE BEYOND SURFACE-LEVEL CHRISTIANITY BY
GROUNDING YOUR IDENTITY IN GRACE, CULTIVATING
MEANINGFUL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, AND RECOVERING BOLD
CONFIDENCE IN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL**

It's easy to clap for the 5:00 p.m. service video. Right? It's a little harder to head to the 5:00 p.m. service. Guys, if you're new... I met some people in the lobby. Each week we have people who are new. Here's something I want you to understand about us. And, yes, this is for our Multiply Campus and Lexington Campus, but specifically for those at our Winston-Salem Campus. We have always had a Sunday night service.

When we came here in 2016, we had a Sunday night service at Goler AME Zion Church downtown. Then, when we outgrew that space and moved to Northwest Boulevard, where our Multiply Campus meets right now, we didn't get rid of our Sunday night services; we just added morning services and kept our Sunday night. Then when we moved into *this* building, we still kept our Sunday night.

Now, why are we doing this? I mean, most churches are trying to get rid of their Sunday night service. I want to tell you why. Two reasons: because we need it and because we like it. We need it because... At our Winston-Salem Campus, I want you to look around the room right now. Are there any seats? You might say... You know, the cynical person goes, "I see a seat up *there*. I see two seats over *here*."

Let me explain the church world to us just for a second. By the way, do you notice they're bringing chairs in right now? If a family of five can't find a seat five minutes into service, we're out of space. I'm looking. There's not... I don't even see two seats together right

now. Guys, look. People who come for the first time... I don't know if it's a North Carolina thing. They come on Sunday morning.

We're trying to make space for people. Okay? That's why we sent you the text. That's why I showed you this video that you probably already saw online. It's because we're trying to move people to... It's the shortest mission trip you will ever take. Okay? I just want to encourage you. We need it. We need space because we don't have space for a person. We don't have a seat for them. If we don't have a seat for them, we can't disciple them.

But we also really like it. This is the second time I'm giving this sermon. Tonight will be the third time I'm giving this sermon. I usually get a little bit better as the day goes on. If you've never come to Sunday night, you've never heard the best version of the sermon. So I'd encourage you. Let me ask you guys to consider coming with your Community Group. If you serve, come to Sunday night on a night you don't serve. If you don't serve, start serving, but then come to Sunday night on nights you don't serve. Okay?

Look. I wanted to tell you guys about that, but I also want to tell you about our Multiply Campus. We launched it last week. Can we give them a round of applause? I love it. We had over 300 people there. We had new guests. We had people sign up for the Weekender. We are headed to Davie County as quickly as possible. We're praying for open doors and people of peace.

You might be asking, "Where are we going to go next? Where's the next best place for us to go?" Here's how we think about it: where we have a lot of groups more than 20 minutes away, we will one day have a campus. But I know what you've been waiting for. You've been waiting to know how much this generous church, Two Cities, gave to Hold the Rope. Look at your neighbor and say, "I've been wanting to know."

By the way, we had the highest ever general giving in December as well. So, our church was not only generous to our church, but also... Hold the Rope, by the way, if you're new, is to help other ministries, churches, and all that, locally, nationally, and globally to help us with our sending.

Here's how it works. We have a \$9.5 million budget. The rule of thumb is if you get up here, and you give vision, and the church sees the need, and all that, a good goal would be that the church would give 10 percent of the annual budget in a one-time gift. That would be \$950,000.

Last year we brought in a million, so we thought, "We're probably going to bring in more than a million," but we didn't have a financial goal; we had a participation goal: 100 percent of people who call Two Cities Church home. Well, guys, I'm encouraged. It's my

privilege to share with you that we raised \$1,455,850.69, which brings up an obvious question: Who gave 69 cents to Hold the Rope? I don't know.

Here's the neat thing. I told you we were going to go to Butner. Right? Butner is the only federal prison in the state of North Carolina. I got up here a month or two ago and said, "Guys, we're going to do it, but it's not going to be easy, and it's not going to be cheap." I said, "It's going to cost at least, bare minimum, just to get up and running, \$150,000." Well, here's what I want to encourage you with. I had a couple in this church call me and say they want to pay all \$150,000. That's worth clapping for.

I want to encourage you. If there were a couple of you out there who thought, "I could give \$150,000," you still can. Guys, this is so powerful, because the couple that gave this said, "You know what? We want to give this because we want to see men in prison be set free, and we also want to see our church be changed and transformed as we minister in the prisons." Let's pray.

Lord, across all of our campuses, we just are grateful, and we thank God. We thank you, Lord, for the ability to be generous. The entire gospel centers on the generosity of God toward us. Lord, I thank you for every generous gift, the one I just mentioned, but I thank you for the single mom who gave the widow's mite. I thank you for families that reorganized and Christmas maybe looked a little different. I thank you for the people who gave so sacrificially, but no one will know except for you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Grab your journals. This is your passport. This is your guide. Last week, I was kind of the compass setting the direction. This will be your map. Now you've got your sticker. More stickers to come. Here's the thing. We're going to be in Romans. Get to Romans 1:7. Here's what we're doing today. We're going to talk about being deep. Are you a deep person or are you a shallow person? Ask your spouse afterward. Ask your parents. Ask your friends.

Here's the thing. We all want to be deep. You don't want to be shallow. If I asked, "Who wants to be shallow?" I don't think anyone would raise their hand. But what does it mean to be deep? Every once in a while, you'll listen to a podcast and say, "That was deep." Every once in a while, you'll be on your Instagram, or whatever, and you'll see some quote and share it, and you'll go, "This is deep."

Every once in a while, you'll see a movie or a show, and afterward you go, "That was deep." What does *deep* mean? *Deep* means "This affects everything." When you hear something that's deep, you're like, "That affects my marriage, my family, my finances, my addiction, my habits, my work, my health, and my leisure. It affects everything."

Here's the problem with you, and here's the problem with me: we're not very deep people. We don't think very deeply. The apostle Paul thought very deeply. This letter is a 16-chapter argument that we're going to be unpacking. When you *think* deep, hopefully you're going to *feel* deep.

Let me tell you the problem with Romans. Here's what has happened with the book of Romans: it has been hijacked by thinkers, not doers. What I don't want to have happen in this book is for you at the end... You know, it's the end of 2026, and you have a big brain and a little heart, or you have a big brain and little hands. The reason we have the book of Romans is not just so we can *think* like Paul, but hopefully, at the end of this series, so we can *live* like Paul.

So, here's what I'm going to do. Today, I'm going to share with you guys from Scripture, from Romans 1:7-17, four ways you can be deeper or go deeper. If you want to be a *different* person, you're going to need to be a *deeper* person. So, pick up with me in verse 7.

In verse 7, Paul says, "**To all those in Rome...**" Do you see that? I'm just going to start with the first part. He says, "**To all those in Rome...**" I didn't talk about this last week. I'm going to get to the four ways to be deeper in a second. I didn't really talk a lot about Rome.

First of all, notice he doesn't say, "To the church in Rome." He says, "To all those in Rome." Why? Because most commentators, most scholars think this was one church in Rome that was spread about through different locations. That sounds like *our* church. Some of you might be cynical about multisite. Some of you might think multisite is a new idea. No, we're just using technology differently.

Even in the church of Rome, even right after Jesus dies and rises from the dead, you have one church in multiple locations meeting around the city of Rome. Rome is a big city, guys. I mean, maybe we don't consider it huge for today, but back then it was the first city in human history that we've ever recorded that was more than one million people. It means it was dense. It means it was populated.

Here's the first thing I want us to understand. We'll just talk about this for a minute. We're talking about being centered and sent. Right? That's what this whole year is about. Paul wants to take the center of his faith, the gospel, to the center of culture. That's the type of church, by the grace of God, we're trying to build here.

Just so you know, we're not going to the fringes. I want you to look at the hospital you work for and ask, "How do I bring the gospel to the center of it?" I want you to look at your university. I want you to look at your high school. I want you to look at your bank, or

wherever you work, and I want you to look at your neighborhood and ask, "How do I bring it to the center?" For some reason, as Christians, we're afraid to bring it to the center.

I remember... I'm not trying to be a hero. I'm just telling you a story from my life. I remember I go to Duke University to do ministry. Duke is a big... I just say "Duke" and people get scared. "Ooh, it's scary." It's a big, scary place. I remember I was talking to some Christians at Duke. They were in the church I was a part of. I said, "Guys, I want to go to the center of Duke's campus. I think I'm going to go to the fraternities."

They were like, "Don't go to the fraternities. They're big and scary." Then one kid said, "No, no. Here. There's one fraternity that has, like, two Christians in it. Maybe they'll be nice to you." I said, "I don't want to go to the fraternity with two Christians in it." I said, "I want to know... What is the most influential, most partying, craziest fraternity on campus?" They were like, "KA."

So, I go on the website. I can't even find who the president is. So I'm like, "I've got to go to this fraternity house," which is in the center of campus. "I've got to go to this fraternity house, and I've got to knock on the door as a nobody, and I've got to ask for the president of the biggest and most popular and influential fraternity."

God was gracious, and he was in my Bible study, but my whole point is what it communicated was such a good time for me and for the students who were in our little student college ministry. It was like, "Guys, we're not playing games here. We're taking the center of our faith to the center of influence."

So, Paul takes us to the center. Now, here are four ways we can be deeper. I'll give you the first one. *We need a deeper understanding of God's love for us.* Let me read you the verse. ***"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."***

Okay. As soon as I start talking about the love of God, it's like "Yawn, yawn." Right? I came to Christ in high school. I came out of nominal Catholicism. I start sharing my faith. I remember I go over to my friend's house. He's not a believer. His parents aren't believers. They're asking me about why I'm going to church. They don't understand it. I start sharing my faith with them.

I'll never forget this guy...classic Pittsburgh guy. He says, "Kyle, I'm tired of people telling me God loves me." Then he said, "I know God loves me." I thought, "That's the problem." We're going to talk about the love of God. Throughout this year, I'm going to say things you're not going to like, but they're going to arise... I'm going to show you this. They're

things that the average American and, sadly, the average American Christian does not think about, does not understand, and when they first hear it, it shocks them.

Here's one of the first things: God doesn't love everybody the same. Some of you are like, "What? That doesn't even make sense." Because the verse everybody knows is... Well, actually, the first verse everybody knows is "Judge not lest you be judged." That's Americans' favorite verse, taken out of context. The second verse every American knows is "God is love."

Well, listen to this: God loves some people in all ways and all people in some ways. You could probably spend a year thinking about that. God loves some people in all ways and all people in some ways. There are actually three types of the love of God. Well, actually there are five. I just don't have time to get into all of them. I'll give you the three main ones.

The first love of God is his *common grace love*. I can say, "God loves everybody," but what I mean by that... I mean, I'm thinking about it. It means God has a providential care for all of his creation. This is taught clearly all through the Scripture, but especially in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus is like, "Hey, it rains on both the just and the unjust." You think about it, and you're like, "Yeah. How could God be so good to people who hate him so much?" It's called his *providential* or his *general* or his *common grace love*.

There's a second type of love, and it's the end zone verse love. Do you remember this? Not anymore, but there would always be a guy wearing a shirt, and he'd be in the NFL end zone background, holding up John 3:16. "For God so..." By the way, we misread that. We read it, "God *sooo* loved the world." No. It means "God in this manner..." That's what the word means. "This is how."

"God in this manner loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life." It's God's *inviting love*. It's his merciful, invitational love, that we could say, "Jesus Christ loved you and died for you and extends the gospel, and whosoever believes can have eternal life."

But there's a third love, and it's a *unique love* God has for his kids. Until you become a Christian, you're one of God's creatures, but you're not one of God's kids. God has a special love for his church. He loves his church uniquely. In fact, there are actually verses... You can just think about this for a second. There are a bunch of promises in the Bible only for Christians.

Romans 8: "All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Here's the thing: if a non-Christian is going through horrible

suffering and hardship, I can't, on the authority of Scripture, tell them it is going to work out for their good. How can you say that to a person whose current destination is hell?

And it makes sense. We have this in us as humans. If you're a parent, you love your kids' friends, and you love kids you meet. You may serve in our student ministry. You may serve in our kids' ministry. But you're going to say, "You know what? That's right. I love all kids, and I have a special love for *my* kids."

This love for us is what's called *efficacious*. It means it's a love that changes us. That's why he says that we are loved by God and called to be saints. Now, if you're like me... I'm a retired Catholic from Pittsburgh. I never thought I was going to be a pastor. I grew up nominal Catholic.

I thought *saints* was a special class of Christian. You normally had to die, and then someone had to say you did a miracle afterward, and all this kind of stuff, and then you'd get to be considered a saint. A saint in the Bible is what God calls us and makes us into when we believe in Christ.

Here's the thing: when you realize you're loved by God, it changes you. You can see this. This works for men and women, but you can usually see this in a woman who never had a boyfriend in her whole life and all of a sudden finds a great guy and he really just loves on her. It changes everything about her, starting with how she views herself. You start thinking, "I'm the kind of person somebody loves."

Now, here's what you need to know: there are some people who have never been loved their whole life. Their parents didn't love them. And I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "I don't know any of those people." It's because they're not here. That's why you're like, "I've never met anyone like that." They don't meet people. They stay at home.

So, he says we have this love that changes us, and then look at this. He says, "Grace and peace to you." Now, this is interesting. I find this fascinating. Paul starts every one of his 13 letters with "Grace and peace," without exception. There's not an exception. Paul ends all of his 13 letters with "Grace and peace." No exceptions. This can't be a coincidence. Someone should write a whole dissertation on this. I don't fully get it.

Here's what's interesting about grace. When Paul mentions grace, he always mentions it first but never mentions it alone. I can't remember my own sermons, but if you remember my sermon from last week, I quoted Scripture. Paul says he was given grace and apostleship. Interesting. So, grace came first, but something else came with it.

The gospel of John says Jesus Christ shows up, and he is full of grace and truth. Do you see this? *Grace* is always mentioned first but never mentioned alone. People want peace, and they don't understand grace. You can't have peace if you don't understand grace.

Here's why you don't have peace. There are many reasons. I'll try to simplify. If you don't have peace, you're worried about your own sin and failures. So many people are worried that something in their past is going to show up in their present or in their future. When you go, "Look. The grace of God is going to meet me and make up for all of my stupid, sinful, rebellious, foolish mistakes..."

A lot of people are very... You don't have peace because of the future. You know, your dad went into an assisted living home, your daughter went off to college, you have a doctor's appointment about some lump you found on your neck, and who knows what this year holds for you. You can't have peace if you don't first have grace.

Here's where I'm going to mess with you a little bit. *If you want more peace, you need to give more grace.* What's your dining room table like? I'm not saying when you have people over. That's different. *Peace* is the word *shalom*. It means unity. It means harmony. We all want peace. You can be a Christian or not a Christian. You want peace in your home. But you don't get peace unless you give grace.

Grace is "When you sin, I'm not surprised." Should I be surprised when people sin? I'm not surprised when people sin. When *I'm* sinning, I should be quick to confess, and when someone sins against me, I should be so quick to forgive, and I should love giving people second chances.

If you'll do that, you'll have so much peace in your house you won't be able to stand it. Everybody here is a reciprocal creature. We're always watching all the time how everybody else interacts with us. If you start being the kind of person who *gives* grace, you end up being the kind of person who *gets* grace.

So, the first thing we have to understand is we have to have a deeper understanding of God's love for us. Secondly, *we need a deeper love for Christians.* Let me show you this. This is verse 8. ***"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world."***

How is your attitude of gratitude? Instead of gratitude, we tend to be full of grumbling. Someone told me years ago a very helpful leadership principle. Every parent is a leader. This works in parenting. He said the big sin of Israel in the wilderness was grumbling instead of gratitude. He told me the job of any pastor or parent or leader is to do the same two things Moses had to do: stop the people from grumbling and keep them moving forward.

Do you know how powerful gratitude is? I want you to cultivate gratitude in your life because it is so helpful. It's biblical, and you *should*, but you don't like doing things just because you should, so let me just tell you it's really, really helpful. Here's what I mean. I think it is almost (I'll say *almost*) impossible for sin to dwell in a grateful heart.

So, later today, when you're tempted to look at something you shouldn't look at, or you get on Instagram and start getting envious and bitter and greedy and whatever, I want you to stop and go, "You know what the problem is? The problem is I'm not grateful right now." You start being grateful for whatever you can be grateful for.

You don't need to be like, "God, I'm thankful that before the foundation of the world, your only..." You don't need to do that. You just need to go, "Lord, I'm thankful for my health. I'm thankful to be in a warm house on a cold day. God, I'm thankful for a church. I'm thankful for the Bible in my language that I can read." You just start cultivating gratefulness.

Paul says he thanks God for Christians he has never met. Did you notice that? I told you last week he has never been to Rome. Paul is thankful for people he never met. We can't even be thankful for the people we know. Weirdly, the more we know them, the less thankful we are for them. We take them super for granted.

Paul says, "I thank God for you," and then look at what he says. He's going to pray for them. Verse 9: ***"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers..."*** Okay. How do you love people more deeply? This is not a TED Talk where I give you three hacks; it's a biblical talk where I say you pray for them.

The closest point between two people is prayer. We kind of misquote verses by only knowing half of them. You probably know this verse. Jesus said, "Love your enemies," which is hard. No one does it well. We're not great at it. It's probably because we don't know the second half of the verse. Let me finish quoting the verse. "Love your enemies and pray for them."

So, I guess we're supposed to pray for Christians, and we're supposed to pray for enemies, so we're probably just supposed to pray for everybody. Right? It's going to be very, very hard to continue to be angry at somebody if you're continually praying for them. So, here's what we're trying to do here: we're trying to build a prayerful church. That's part of our response culture.

Now, here's the thing. I've told you this before. Because I went to public high school, I have to keep things very simple, if only for myself. So, here's what we want to do. We want to pray *with* people, pray *for* people, and ask people for prayer. Let's actually start

with asking people for prayer. Do you understand, if Christianity is going to get real for you and the people in your life, you need to have real prayer requests?

I mean, I don't want to go beyond Scripture here, but can we stop praying for traveling mercies? If someone is flying to North Korea, we're going to pray for them. If they're heading to Yadkinville for dinner, we're not praying for them. I think God is up there, bored, like, "All right. I got *him* here safely and *her* here safely, and you thanked me for getting everyone there safely. Okay."

When you stop praying for traveling mercies and Timmy's tummy and Sally's stomach (and we believe in physical healing), and you start to say something like, "Hey, there are three people at work the Holy Spirit has put on my heart to share with, and I'm honestly scared, because we have a weird HR department. I'm trying to figure out what it means to be faithful when I'm at work, and I need some boldness, guys. Would you pray for wisdom and boldness and for me to share my faith?"

Here's what people are going to think: "What portal did I just step into?" Because everybody else in your group who has been playing church and giving the unspoken prayer request, or something like that, are going to go, "I don't even know this person. I finally met somebody who's serious about their faith." We need to pray *with* people. We need to pray *for* people. We need to ask for prayer.

Pray *with* people. Realize that when you pray with people, it's going to be awkward at first if you've never prayed with them. Men, you're just going to have to lead in this. You're like, "All right. I have a 15-year-old son. If I try to pray with him, he's going to think this is super weird." Yeah, he is. I don't know the other option. It's like, when was the best time to plant a tree? Twenty years ago or today.

So, you just go, "Dude, I'm sorry." You just call it out. "It's kind of weird. How about I just pray this time?" What you're going to find is pretty soon it's not going to be that weird anymore. We pray *with* people. We pray *for* people. We ask for prayer. Paul actually tells people (this is deep) what he's praying for them. I'll show you. Look at the next verse. He says, "***...asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you...***"

This is what I'm talking about. Paul loves Christians. He prays for Christians. He wants to be with Christians. Paul wants to be in Christian community. Actually, we'll see in a minute, Paul *needs* to be in Christian community. It's hard for me to think the great apostle Paul, the greatest church planter the church has ever seen and the writer of Scripture, needed meaningful Christian community but you don't.

In fact, guys... I mean this in a loving way. I'm tired of trying to motivate some of you to get in Christian community. I'm tired of it. That is my job, so I need to do it anyway. But I'm tired of sitting in my office and going, "I don't know. I used the relational insurance illustration already. I used the phrase *needy and needed* already." I'm trying to figure out what the issue is with some of you, because for me...

And I'm not saying I am exactly how salvation works in everybody's life, but when I became a Christian, it was so unbelievably obvious to me, as well as I had a deep desire in my heart to be a part of Christian community. If you're not part of a Community Group here, you're missing out on at least half of what our church has to offer. You're missing out on one of the greatest resources or tools God tends to use in your life to transform you and change you.

In fact, look at what Paul says. ***"...that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."*** What does Paul mean? Is he bringing Santa's sack of spiritual goods? No. He basically means "I want to use my spiritual gifts to strengthen you, and I want to be encouraged by you."

What are the two purposes of Christian community? Encouragement and strength, or the word Christians used to use, *edify*. How do you get equipped for ministry? You get encouraged, and you get edified.

So, Paul says we need a deeper understanding of God's love for us...grace, peace, turned into saints, efficacious love, and all that. Secondly, we need a deeper love for Christians. That comes by praying for them, as well as doing everything I can... I've told you this before.

If you're not in a Community Group, you're going to have to fight for fellowship. You're going to have to contend for Community Group. You're going to have to go, "Okay. What group is near us? What night works for us?" Then you need to go to the group, and you're like, "All right. These aren't our people." Okay. Great. Find a different group. Paul contended for community.

The third is *we need a deeper love for the lost*. These are basic things, but this is what Paul says. Look at verse 13. ***"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles."***

What does Paul mean by *harvest*? Let me tell you this. You need to know what season you're in. You'll get really depressed if you don't know what season you're in. Some would say the discovery of the seasons was the discovery of civilization, because all of a

sudden you go, "It's winter, but I know what happens after winter. I don't need to worry. I don't need to move."

If you don't know there are seasons... "Oh, it's winter. I have to go." No, no, no. After winter comes spring. Then you know what to do in every season. So, harvesting was the end of something. You had to plant seeds. Then you had to water. (I'm oversimplifying here.) Then you had to cultivate and pull weeds and probably water some more, and then you could harvest.

What we do with these words, unfortunately, the longer we've been in church... We spiritualize these words so much. "Oh, we know that Jesus said, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.'" Let me just speak to normal people for a second, if there are any normal people in here.

Let me just tell you what *harvest* means: spiritual results. Here's what Paul is saying. Is that wrong? The apostle Paul goes, "I'd like to see some spiritual results." I mean, if you don't like that word, you can say *fruit*. But that's what he's saying. Paul goes, "I'd like to see spiritual results two places: in the church and in the culture."

Here's what he's saying. I think this is a good word at the beginning of the year with Romans. Is your faith visible so other people can see it? Paul goes, "Guys, you're going to have the book of Romans, my letter, by the time I get there. You've been Christians for a while. You have Bible teaching. You live in community. I'd like to see some results. Can there be a little ROI on everything that has been invested in you?"

See, here's the thing. In Romans, we're going to go as deep as we've ever gone. I'm going to take us as deep as I can take us. The truth is most of you already know enough Bible to change your whole life. I've told you that before. The biggest hack in counseling is most people already know what they need to do. You already know Ephesians 5 for your marriage; you're just not doing it. You already know you're supposed to raise your kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord; you're just not doing it. You know this.

So, Paul says, "I want to see a harvest in the church." Then he says, "I want to see a harvest outside the church among the Gentiles." He goes, "I want to see people come to faith in Christ," which is the best thing for a church, because if a church doesn't have new believers, it gets inward, and it starts talking about its building all the time. Have you noticed that? The more a church talks about its building and all the maintenance on it and everything they need to do and everything that used to happen there, and they haven't seen a baptism in 20 years...

The best thing for a church is new believers, because new believers bring the chaos that shakes everything up in a church, because they start confessing sin. We're like, "Oh,

you're not supposed to do that." Actually, you *are* supposed to do that. They start inviting their friends to church. I mean, it's good for everybody.

Here's the thing. I don't know this for sure. A little parenthesis. I think, potentially, in America, we are in harvest time. That's what it feels like when I'm reading that last year we had the largest group of young men come back to the church. I don't know as much about the ladies, but I think the average normal dude in our culture is like, "This has all gotten too goofy for me." The culture stuff.

It's like, "I don't believe in wokeism. Secularism is bankrupt. Scientism, the worship of science, is bankrupt, and materialism and feminism and consumerism..." I've told you before. Just remember that I said this. We're going to have a bunch of people in their 40s and 50s coming to our church in the next 10 years who have been lied to their whole lives, and they finally realize it's all broken.

They've been told their career is the most important thing and they shouldn't get married...all that stuff. Self-expression is the highest... They are already tired of it, but they're going to be so tired of it, we're going to see a great harvest around all of America. It's going to be led by churches that don't say, "I told you so," but by churches that are willing to meet them with the grace of God.

Now, Paul says something else. Here's what I want you to realize: Paul views his responsibility and posture toward nonbelievers the exact opposite of you. I'll show you. Verse 14: ***"I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish."***

If we're honest, we do not view evangelism as an obligation; we view it as an option. It's optional. Like, if they ask... I mean, my goodness. If they ask, we'll tell them, and if it's not too awkward, we might bring it up. If we had a relationship for a long time, and I don't think it's going to cost me socially, I might tell them. That's because we think evangelism is optional.

Paul said, "I'm under obligation." Here's literally what it means. You can look this up. In the Greek, the word *obligation*... Paul literally is saying, "I'm a debtor." Now, if there's one thing Americans don't want to be, especially the more middle class and upper middle class people get... "I don't want to owe anybody anything." That's so American. In fact, what people want is "I'd like for, everywhere I go, people owe me something. Wouldn't that be nice? Everywhere I show up, someone owes me something."

Listen. I don't know how to understand Paul except for Paul saying, "I owe the gospel to non-Christians." Think about it this way. This is a little hard to explain, so try to follow this. There are two ways you can be in debt. You could loan me a bunch of money, and

then I'm in debt to you. Or let's say your name is Bob. Bob could give me a bunch of money for somebody else, and I'm in debt to that person until I give it to them. That's what Paul is saying.

Paul goes, "I have the gospel, and I owe it to every person I have a relationship with." Paul would even say, "And I'll build a relationship just for this." But we can start there. We owe the gospel to every person we're in a relationship with. It's hard, because most people... Paul says this. Here's another thing we don't like to hear. Most people are not going to believe.

I had a friend who was in sales. This is what they tell you if you go into sales. If you go into sales and you go to ADP, or whatever, they have all this training for you. Here's what they tell you day one: "*No* had better be your second favorite word. Do not get into sales if *no* is not your second favorite word, because you're going to be hearing it all the time."

In the same way, we're going to share the gospel with people, and most people are not going to believe. Paul says, "I'm not in debt that somebody has to believe; I'm in debt that I have to get it out and share with them." I know what you'd think. You'd think, "Well, Paul, my goodness. You must be miserable, because if I felt like everywhere I went I had to go share the gospel with every person, it would be such a burden to me."

Well, look at what Paul says. You're not going to believe this. Verse 15: "***So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.***" Listen. As you say, "I'm going to bring the gospel to the center of the hospital" or "the center of my neighborhood" or "the center of my grad school," you have to do it with an eagerness. Here's what that means.

You have to bring the gospel to people, not begrudgingly, like, "Oh, God wants me to share this with you." You have to have a smile on your face and a song in your heart. You have to go, "I'm going to go to the most influential, darkest places I know, and I'm going to do it singing. I'm going to do it with steel in my spine, a spring in my step, and a smile on my face." If you do that, people will not know what to do with you, because they're like, "I don't know how to handle somebody who's so serious about God's Word but so joyful."

Why is Paul eager? Listen. *Eagerness* is this idea (if I can, again, talk in common vernacular)... Paul goes, "I have spiritual momentum." Do you know what *momentum* is? It's funny. We had this guy in college ministry. He wasn't the smartest guy ever. We tried to teach him about momentum. We asked, "What's the root word of *momentum*?" He said, "Mom." "No. Try again." *Moment*. Momentum happens when you're winning.

We all would like it if the Wake Forest basketball team would win 10 games in a row. If that happened, they wouldn't be emailing you last minute to try to sell tickets. You

wouldn't be able to get tickets, because by definition, winning creates momentum. Paul goes, "I have seen the gospel win. I have seen it change legacies and lineages and eternal destinies, so I'm eager to see it."

Which leads to the last thing. Paul, how do you do it? How do you be so eager? Paul says there's one other thing. You don't just need a deeper understanding of God's love for you or a deeper love for Christians or a deeper love for the lost. *You need a deeper conviction of the power of the gospel.* I'll show you. This is the theme verse for our year. We'll close with verses 16 and 17.

Paul says, ***"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."*** Why would Paul say, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel"? Because we are all tempted to be ashamed of the gospel. It's interesting. We don't talk about shame a lot. That's more of an Eastern idea. But let me explain it to you. Think about it this way. *Guilt* is personal and private; *shame* is public.

If you've ever gotten caught doing something you shouldn't be doing...someone found something out that wasn't good about you...here's the interesting thing: you most likely felt guilt about that a long time ago. Maybe a lot of guilt. Maybe you thought about confessing it, but it was all really personal. You knew you did it. You knew it was wrong. Maybe you told God you weren't going to do it anymore, and you felt guilt.

But you can't help it. As soon as your friends and family find out...it's involuntary...you feel shame. Shame always has to do with how other people view me. A common soft word for it would be we're *embarrassed*. Honestly, are you ashamed of the gospel? How would you know? I mean, no one is going to raise their hand. We all want to say, "We're not ashamed. Look. Here we are at church today. We're not ashamed of the gospel."

Well, if you're not ashamed of the gospel, then why is it the last thing most people find out about you? Why does everybody know your kid's name and your favorite show and your favorite podcast, but nobody at work knows how important your faith is to you?

Or why is it that some of you have never put anything on social media about your faith? Is that really an accident? We get to see every meal you eat. Every time you're on vacation, you certainly take a lot of pictures. You put your resolutions up, and we see every time you go to the gym or go on a run. You let us all know about *that*.

Let's remove the fig leaf for a second if we can. There's some shame. I just want to encourage you. We don't need to be ashamed of the gospel. We tend to be ashamed of the gospel... You know, every generation is different. At the end of the day, you're

worried about how other people are going to view you because of what you have to tell them.

It's hard, because when you share the gospel with someone, you have to tell them bad news first. You have to tell them about a need they can't fix by themselves. You have to talk to them about a problem they can't solve by themselves. This is why Paul says in Romans 1:16 that the gospel is the power of God.

If you want to know the number one reason we are ashamed of the gospel, it's because we're not personally experiencing its power enough. What is power? *Power* is literally the ability to change something. If you've been in church for a while, you probably have heard that Paul uses the word *dunamis* here for *power*. Maybe you can hear the English word in that: *dynamite*.

Paul goes, "This gospel is so powerful it's like dynamite." It's so powerful because it has the ability to change legacies, lifestyles, lineage, and eternal destinies. And it's not just change temporarily; it's lasting change. In fact, here's the power of the gospel. He says, "For the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

Listen. The gospel is the power of God in verbal form. I've experienced this before. I've experienced it in sitting under gospel preaching, and I just feel power. I've experienced it in preaching before. There are times I can feel the power of God in sharing the gospel message.

Charles Spurgeon, one of my heroes... He was the first megachurch pastor ever. His church maybe sat 5,000, because back then there was no sound amplification. So, he went out one day to work on his voice, because back then, again, there were no mics. As the story goes (this is a true story), he goes out into the worship center. He thinks he's all alone, and he just starts quoting Scripture. He's just working on his voice, hearing the reverberations.

One of the Scriptures he says is, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." He thought he was alone, but there was a worker in the rafters. He would later find out that the worker in the rafters came to faith in Christ just hearing him read Scripture.

See, in the gospel is the power of God. It's because of what's revealed. Let me show you this. Verse 17: "***For in it the righteousness of God...***" Not the love of God. Not the grace of God. Not the truth of God. "***...the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'***"

Let me explain the righteousness of God. You can see the root word of *righteousness* is *right*. Paul is going to unpack this for 15 chapters. We'll go deep, deep, deep into it. But let me simplify it. What is the righteousness of God? God is right and you are wrong. That's the beginning of having a relationship with God.

By the way, confession is just agreeing with God. That's what it is. Confession says, "God, you are right and I am wrong. God, you do what is right and I do what is wrong." See, here's what happens. I want to take the term *righteousness*, which sounds religious and far up, and I want to say there are only three options with righteousness. Let me give them to you.

First is to be *unrighteous*. I don't want you to stay unrighteous. You *are* unrighteous apart from Christ, but unrighteousness is to look at your sin and not look at your Savior. See, what happens with people is some people get into depression and even suicidal ideation because they realize how broken and sinful they are, but they don't ever look at the cross, they don't ever understand the grace of God, and they don't understand that Jesus can save them.

There was a guy in our church. He said, "I was bringing my 'one' to church, but he's not coming anymore." I said, "What happened?" This is a true story. He said, "He told me your preaching is not good for his mental health." I said, "I don't know if my preaching is good for *my* mental health." What he meant... He said, "He doesn't understand grace, and he doesn't believe Jesus died for his sins, so all he can hear is the negative things he's not doing and the ways he's messed up." I'm like, "Yeah, that'll..." We can't stay unrighteous.

The second option (we'll unpack this in chapter 2) is *self-righteous*. There are only three options. You can be unrighteous. That's really who you are apart from Christ. You can be self-righteous, and man, will we hit that, because that's all in the church and the culture. It's a sense of moral superiority that somehow I'm better than other people. That's bankrupt and doesn't work and is an illusion.

The third is *gift righteousness*. The Bible says it's revealed *from* faith *for* faith. In other words, God ends up giving us the very thing he demands from us: his righteousness. That's why it was important for Jesus to live a sinless life. Jesus had to live a sinless life because he had to be our righteousness.

God requires two things of you: that your sins be punished and your life be righteous. At the cross of Christ, Jesus was our punishment. In his sinless life, he was our perfection, and he gives us his righteousness. He says, "All of this is from faith for faith." In other

words, as we realize all that God has done for us... If we're going to go and be deeper and live deeper, we have to do it by faith.

So, here's what we're going to do. I told you we've organized the whole service to create more space and more margin for you to respond. Here's what I'm going to ask you. For some of you, this is brand new to you, and that's fine. I'm never going to pressure anyone, but I'm going to invite you to come forward in just a minute or two. Come up here and pray. Maybe come up with somebody and just pray, "God, would you make me a deeper person?" in some area.

At the 9:00 service, I saw some lady come down here and pray. Then I saw another lady who knew her come around her and bear hug her. I thought, "I don't know what's going on there. I don't know what they're going through together. I don't know what they're praying about, but they need to go deeper in some area."

Some of you need to go deeper in your understanding of the love of God and understanding of the gospel for yourself. You need to return to your first love, to quote Revelation. Others of you just need a love for Christians. There's some Christian or some relationship in your life, and you need to forgive them, and you need to pray for them. Just come up.

Others of you... There are lost people. There are prodigals. This is going to be a time to pray. For many of us, we probably just need to come forward and go, "God, help me. I've been ashamed. Make me more like the apostle Paul who was eager and unashamed of the gospel." Guys, this response time is for Christians who are trying to get things right. We're just normal, everyday, real Christians who are going, "I want to get it right." If you'll stand, we're going to respond. I'll pray with us and get us started.

Lord, I thank you that all across this room and all across our campuses you're calling us to respond. This is it. You reveal things and we respond, Lord, and there's so much you're going to reveal. Lord, would you make us deeper people? Would some of us even just make some commitments right now? We need to come forward. There's something in our life we know is hindering us from being a deeper person, from going deeper.

Lord, I pray for couples to come up here holding hands, praying for one another. Lord, I just pray for a culture of prayer. We see that Paul prayed *with* people, and Paul prayed *for* people, and Paul asked for prayer, and we could think of no better way to end our service. We do it all in Jesus' name.