

"NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL"
Romans 1:16, 17

Intro: Paul wrote to the church at Rome in the middle 50's A.D.--probably A.D. 56. It would be about six years before he would actually get to Rome--which he did about A.D. 62. He had planned to go to Rome many times, as he mentioned in Rom. 1:13, but had been hindered by other opportunities that kept coming up. Rome had been very much in his prayers. He had preached in Athens which was the center of Gentile philosophy; he wanted to preach in Rome which was the center of Gentile power. If God would be pleased to bless the preaching of the Gospel in Rome, the effect would most certainly be felt throughout the Empire.

But one problem that Paul would face in Rome that he did not have to face in Athens was that, as Alexander Maclaren pointed out so clearly (Vol. 8, p. 31), the Romans were not interested in ideas, in truth, as much as in military--"sharp swords and iron yokes on the necks of subject peoples" (Ibid.). They were interested in power, but a different kind of power from that which Paul had in mind when he wrote,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ:
for it is the power of God unto salvation
to every one that believeth;
to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Paul wanted the church at Rome to know that he would have no hesitation in preaching the Gospel in Rome even though that was not the kind of power that the Romans were interested in. However, the Gospel possessed a power that went far beyond anything that the leaders of the Roman Empire had ever thought of. It was a power that could transform the greatest of sinners into saints, making them totally and eternally acceptable to God!

The two verses that I want to consider with you are very important for several reasons. Let me mention three.

First of all, they give us the theme of this Epistle to the church at Rome. If you want Romans in a nutshell, here it is! (Quote.)

But secondly, it is important because it was Paul's testimony regarding the Gospel. As he had said in the two verses before this, he felt an obligation to preach the Gospel in Rome, and he was ready, he was eager, to fulfill that obligation. He had no hesitation in preaching the Gospel in Rome. He had preached it elsewhere; he wanted to preach it there also.

But there is a third reason.

Paul quite evidently wanted the believers at Rome to feel the same way! And this means that you and I need to feel this way about preaching the Gospel in Portland, or Vancouver, or Gresham, or wherever it is that you live. It might not be what people want to hear, what they are interested in hearing, but it is what they need to hear. And so we need to be motivated by the thought that there is nothing in the Gospel of Christ for which we need to be ashamed. In fact, we should look upon the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel as the greatest honor that could possibly be conferred upon us.

May our consideration of these two verses this morning bring us to the place in our thinking where the words of Paul can really become our words.

But let us look into these verses.

First, I would ask,

I. WHY ASHAMED?

Why would Paul make such a statement if there were not the possibility that he and we could actually be ashamed of the Gospel? Obviously that would be a possibility.

The words "of Christ" which come after "the gospel" are not found in many manuscripts of the book of Romans. The first line of the verse simply reads, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel." But Paul told the Roman believers in the first verses of this epistle that "the gospel of God" has to do with Christ. So it can rightly be called "the gospel of Christ." You cannot preach the Gospel without preaching Christ.

I mention all of this to point out that you cannot be ashamed of the Gospel without being ashamed to Christ.

What does it mean to be ashamed of the Gospel, or to be ashamed of Christ?

I can think of one big reason.

We are inclined to be ashamed of the Gospel because we are fearful of the consequences which we may experience by giving the Gospel to others. Paul knew the results far better than we do. He was hated by his countrymen and by Gentiles as well. He had been beaten, had been imprisoned, had gone hungry. Read 2 Cor. 12 and you will see what it meant to Paul to preach the Gospel. He told the Corinthians when he wrote to them that the Gospel was a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the

Gentiles. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:23. And yet Paul declared that he was not ashamed of the Gospel among any people, Jews or Gentiles. Although he never knew what the outcome would be when he preached the Gospel, one thing that he could say from the heart was that he was never ashamed of the Gospel, never ashamed of Christ, always thankful for the privilege of telling anyone about the Savior.

When, in the early days of the church, Peter and John were "commanded...not to speak at all nor teach in the name of the Jesus" (Acts 4:18), they went back to the church, and together they prayed this prayer:

...Lord, behold their threatenings:
and grant unto thy servants,
that with all boldness they may speak thy word
(Acts 4:29).

These were people who were not ashamed of the Gospel!
But they knew that the Lord was the only One Who could give them the boldness to continue witnessing in the face of great opposition.

If we are going to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel, we will have to forget about the consequences. Without a doubt some people are going to get mad. But we do not witness because we have been promised great success. We witness because this is what our Lord has told us to do-- to witness with our lives, but also to give verbal testimony to the Gospel

Do you remember what Paul told the Ephesian elders the last time that he met with them? He said that even the Holy Spirit had told him that "bonds and afflictions" (Acts 20:23) were waiting for him in Jerusalem. But then he said this:

But none of these things move me,
neither count I my life dear unto myself,
so that I might finish my course with joy,
and the ministry,
which I have received of the Lord Jesus,
to testify the gospel of the grace of God
(Acts 20:24).

Things will have to get much worse in our country before we will face what Paul faced, but what we need to be concerned about is whether or not we are ashamed of the Gospel because we are afraid of the consequences of speaking out for Christ. Paul was not, and neither should we be. Let us pray for that fearlessness that has characterized the Lord's people in the past.

But let me go on to a second question.

II. WHY "NOT ASHAMED"?

Paul not only told the Roman church that he was "not ashamed," but he also told them WHY he was "not ashamed." If we understand his reasons, it will help us to come to the place where we can say what he said. Problems like this in our lives are usually met when we come to a clearer understanding of the truth.

Paul gave two reasons in these two verses for the boldness that he had in speaking of Christ, two reasons as to why he was "not ashamed of the gospel." If I had the time this morning, I would go on to verse 18 to give you a third reason. But we will stay with verses 16 and 17.

The two reasons are introduced with the word "for."

- A. Reason #1: "For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16b).

If the news world-wide which we read in our newspapers, see on television, or hear on radio, tells us anything, it tells us that there is something terribly wrong with man. Most people don't understand this because they are spiritually blinded. But the evidence is overwhelming that the world's greatest problem is man himself. Whether people like to hear it or not, man is a sinner, alienated from God, in bondage to his sinful heart, and unable to set himself free.

Rome was like that. Athens was like that. Jerusalem was like that. But Paul knew that he had the one and only answer to man's need--his need in daily life, and his need before God. And that answer was the Gospel. The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation"--not a power, but "the power."

And what is "salvation"?

"Salvation" is that big, grand, and glorious word for the work of God in the hearts of people. It includes not only salvation from sin's penalty, but deliverance from sin's power here and now, and our ultimate deliverance from sin itself when we go to be with the Lord.

Rome's military power was not the answer. It was but

a major tool for the expression of man's sinfulness. Athens' philosophy was not the answer. It was human wisdom at its best, which was never able to bring a single soul to the true God and to heaven. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed...."

When we understand what man's need is, and what the Gospel is (and that there is only one Gospel), how can we be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? When sinners put their trust for salvation in Christ Who died for our sins, and Who has been raised from the dead, then they are saved, saved immediately and saved eternally. How can we possibly be "ashamed" to tell people about the One Who is God's only provision for salvation from our sins?

It started with the Jews, and then went to the Gentiles. There is not one Saviour for Jews in Jerusalem, and another for Gentiles in Athens and Rome. Christ is the only hope for Jews and Gentiles wherever they may be.

But now let us look at:

- B. Reason #2: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).

Paul was quoting from Hab. 2:4, and that verse is also found in Gal. 3:11 and Heb. 10:38. It is one of the most important texts of Scripture.

Why is the Gospel the only true way of salvation? Because it is the only way in which guilty sinners can be covered with the righteousness of God. Christ took our sin upon Himself at the Cross that we might be covered with God's righteousness.

Other religions may tell man how to be good; the Gospel makes us good--not all at once, but the work begins by faith, and continues by faith, from one degree to higher degrees, until when the Lord comes we will be all that we should be, made like our blessed Lord and Savior.

This is what Paul was talking about in 2 Cor. 5:21:
For he (God) hath made him (Christ),
who knew no sin, to be sin for us
that we might be made
the righteousness of God in him.

We are saved by faith; we go on trusting him and so it can be said that we live by faith.

Concl: Why is this a message that stirs up such opposition among Jews and Gentiles alike, so much so that many Christians are "ashamed of the gospel," and never speak of Christ?

Because the Gospel condemns man as he is, and tells him that he can never remedy the situation for himself. Salvation is not a reward that God gives us for doing good works; salvation is God's work for us through Christ, a work that has to be done by grace because we do not deserve it at all!

Because we are sinners, we have a huge debt which we owe to God, a debt which will send us to hell unless we take the forgiveness which God has provided for us in Christ.

For the wages of sin is death;
but the gift of God is eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

What shall we do to be saved? Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer what he wrote here in our text. Only they said it like this: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

I ask all of you today, "Are you saved? Are you trusting Christ as your Savior?" Only God can change you and me--that is why it is important to know that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." It takes nothing less than divine power to change us into new creatures. We can't save ourselves, but God can.

But let me ask another question to all of us who know the Lord: "Does your failure to talk to others about Christ show that you are ashamed of the Gospel, and ashamed of Christ? Is our comfort more important than pleasing God? And is it more important for us to have things go well for us, or should we be telling people about Christ, the only Savior?"

The call of God is upon all of us who know the Savior. We are commissioned to go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel. Most of us will never go to others lands, but we have a mission field all around us. By God's grace let us cast off our needless fears, and spread the message to all who will listen to us that Jesus saves! He alone provides salvation and brings us to God.