

Sermons through

Romans

Ashamed of the Gospel

Romans 1:16

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).

Review

After his salutation a great deal of Paul's introduction includes his affection for the church at Rome. He is thankful for their faith, he mentions them in his prayers without ceasing, he longs to see them to impart some spiritual gift that they might be established and that there might be mutual encouragement.

He wants the church to know that he had often planned to come to them but was hindered (likely due to other ministerial obligations). It was his desire that the church be fruitful. Paul viewed himself as a debtor to all men when it came to the gospel – as if he owed it to all men to herald the good news. He was eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome. Verse 15 is followed in verse 16 with the conjunction “for” informing us why Paul is eager to preach.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16a)

Ashamed of the Gospel

I have a distinct advantage when it comes to evangelism. It is inextricably linked to my profession. When someone asks what I do and I answer that I am a pastor, the topic is now on the table. I realize that it is not always quite so natural for Christians to broach the subject. To force the topic of the gospel into a conversation can be awkward and unnatural. All ill-timed segue can make both people in the conversation feel like they're in the midst of a forced sales transaction rather a loving, ministerial dialogue.

When Christians mature and develop a well-orbed Christian life and world view these transitions become natural and almost inevitable. The

loving, gracious, generous, wise Christian man or woman will often be asked to render their opinion on a variety of subjects and why they think that way. Whether it's how you raise your children, why you exhibit such patience, why you're so respectful to adults, why you work so hard, why you vote the way you vote, why you love the way you love, etc. all leads back to what a person believes. All of this assumes some consistency between what we believe, how we behave and the decisions we make in life.

Sadly it is not uncommon for people to make a Christian profession of faith, similar to a current high-profile politician, and then in the same paragraph offer an opinion that is in direct contradiction to that profession. It is man's effort at serving two masters that inhibits the conversation to move toward the gospel and the glory of God. It would appear that for many people who profess faith, God has little to do with their daily decisions. The conversation then leads, not to Christ, but to tradition, psychological, sociology, cultural icons or some other secular phenomenon.

To reason to the glory of God for our decisions, to many, sounds plebian and it is here that we may be tempted to be ashamed.

In our current culture it is not so very difficult for a pastor to preach the gospel (although that seems to be changing); it is in fact expected. For Paul though, as a sort of trailblazer, preaching the gospel – often to pagans, it was frequently greeted with mockery and contempt.

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this" (Acts 17:32).

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 (1 Corinthians 1:18).

but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23).

It has been said that when it came to Paul and the gospel...

...It had brought him neither ease nor comfort: "Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Beroea, laughed at in Athens. He had preached in Corinth where his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling-block to the Jews" (Barclay).¹

It is in this backdrop that Paul declares that he is not ashamed of the gospel – ashamed meaning to feel shame or disgrace because of some particular event or activity (Romans 6:21). Paul is perhaps pondering the words of Jesus recorded in the gospel of Mark.

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

Jesus, so to speak, draws a line in the sand with these words – realizing that the ways of man are so at odds with the ways of Christ that the temptation to be ashamed is inevitable. And though the follower of Christ will, all his/her life struggle with sin and certain degrees of failure in following their Master, they will always seek to repent and, at very least, know who their Master is.

There may be the temporary carnal shame of belief in Christ in the midst of those who are wise and righteous in their own eyes, but there is the eternal shame of standing naked and guilty before a holy God. Therefore it is with great confidence that the psalmist writes:

In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame!² In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me, and save me!³ Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come; you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress (Psalm 71:1-3).

¹ Morris, L. (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans* (66–67). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

The Christian must be prepared to be in the minority and we should not underestimate the influence of the majority in our lives. As a fourth-grader I recall being given a short quiz in school. The teacher began reading the answers out loud and gave us the opportunity to correct our work. I had arrived at an answer in one question and the entire class had a different answer. I, of course, assumed I was wrong and the rest of the class correct (I was neither a confident nor competent student I might add).

When the teacher asked if anyone had a different answer I was too embarrassed to offer my answer. I had, in fact, taken the opportunity to change it. As it just so happened my answer was the correct one. It dawned on me at that young age that it is possible for the entire class to be wrong. Paul did not overestimate the wisdom of his culture and neither should we.

Gospel

The gospel is the good news. It is the good news that there is a God in heaven who has not left men to their own devices. It is the good news that God has kept His promise to send a deliverer who, by His own blood, will effectually call, purchase, redeem, regenerate, forgive, adopt and sanctify fallen men – and the entirety of creation itself (Romans 8:21). It is the good news that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

Paul does not say that the gospel contains power, but that it is the power *dunamis* of God. It is God's dynamite. We often think of dynamite as being destructive and it certainly can be. But it can also be used to put out fires and unearth precious metals. It is by the giving of the very message that the power of the message is, by the Spirit of God, applied to the hearts, ears, eyes and souls of sinful men.

Paul knew this all too well and did all he could to give the message in purity then get out of the way.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech

and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Calvin taught:

But observe how much Paul ascribes to the ministry of the word, when he testifies that God thereby puts forth his power to save; for he speaks not here of any secret revelation, but of vocal preaching. It hence follows, that those as it were willfully despise the power of God, and drive away from them his delivering hand, who withdraw themselves from the hearing of the word.²

Charles Hodge affirms that same:

The gospel is then declared to be that through which God exercises his power.³

...for it is the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16b)

To Salvation

It has been said that knowledge is power and to a limited degree that may be true. But it isn't power to or toward salvation. There is only one thing that contains the power of God toward salvation and that is the gospel of Christ. And what is this salvation? We spoke of it briefly but we can augment it further.

² Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: Romans* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 1:16). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

³ Hodge on Romans, p.28

Salvation is deliverance – deliverance from guilt (Ephesians 1:7, pollution (Romans 6:6), slavery to sin (Romans 7:24), punishment and death (Ephesians 2:1-6). Salvation is also deliverance to righteousness (Romans 3:21-26), holiness (Romans 6:1-4), freedom (Galatians 5:1) fellowship, love and everlasting life with God (Ephesians 2:1-13; Romans 5:5).

Salvation is deliverance from all the effects, curses and wrath of the fall and into the eternal blessed and peace with our Maker forever...

...for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16c)

For Believers

In one sense this deliverance is universal and in another sense it is not. When Paul mentions the Jews and also the Greeks in his context it would mean all men. The gospel was first preached to the Jews then to the whole world – so in that sense it is universal.

But it might be said that this blessed salvation is extended to all men without distinction but not all without exception. It is **“for everyone who believes.”** And by this we should not draw the conclusion that salvation is a matter of man’s mere choice, as if God will damn men for simply failing to arrive at the proper conclusion given numerous viable options.

Two things (at least) we can say about belief:

One is that there is a moral imperative to believe. A failure to believe is not matter of choosing poorly due to a lack of knowledge, insight or wisdom. It is an act of rebellion.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12).

A failure to believe is a failure to recognize a legitimate authority. A few months ago I made a right turn that, apparently, I should not have made. So some man pulled me over and started telling me things I had to do and not do. I guess I could have been tempted to ask “Who do you think you are?” or something like that. But I looked down and he had a big

gun on his hip. So I guess I could have waited for the opportune moment and did some ninja moves on him and relieve him of his gun.

The story being what it is I think either one of those responses could have been justified except for one thing – as I looked more closely the man had a big shiny badge. That changes everything. The badge revealed to me, at least to a certain extent, that this man was a legitimate authority, and for me to disregard that authority would be wrong and would have consequences. Later in this chapter Paul will explain that all men, not only know there is a God, but know the true God but actively suppress that clear truth (Romans 1:18-21).

The second thing we can say is that belief, or faith, is itself a gift of God whereby He overcomes our natural rebellion. Perhaps the best definition, one we will conclude with this morning, is found in Question 72 of the Larger Westminster Catechism in answer to the question: ‘What is Justifying Faith?’

Justifying faith is a saving grace, (Heb. 10:39) wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:13, Eph. 1:17-19) and word of God, (Rom. 10:14-17) whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, (Acts 2:37, Acts 16:30, John 16:8-9, Rom. 5:6, Eph. 2:1, Acts 4:12) not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, (Eph. 1:13) but received and rested upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, (John 1:12, Acts 16:31, Acts 10:43) and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation. (Phil. 3:9, Acts 15:11)⁴

⁴ *The Westminster larger catechism : With scripture proofs.* 1996. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Questions for Study

1. Why was the Apostle Paul eager to preach the gospel (page 2)?
2. Why do you suppose it is difficult to natural bring the gospel into conversations (pages 2, 3)?
3. Have you ever been ashamed of the gospel? Why? What do you do (pages 2-4)?
4. Discuss the responses the Apostle Paul had to his gospel message (pages 2, 3).
5. What did Jesus teach about being ashamed of Him and His words? What are the consequences (page 3)?
6. Where do we find refuge from shame (page 4)?
7. Are you ever in the minority when it comes to you faith? How does that affect you (page 5)?
8. What is the gospel (pages 5, 6)?
9. Discuss and define salvation (pages 6, 7).
10. Is belief merely a matter of making a proper choice? Discuss belief – what it is, where it comes from, what it does (pages 7, 8).