

Power of the Gospel: Freedom from Judgement & Shame

Romans 1:8-17

*For I am not **ashamed** of the gospel, for it is the power of God for **salvation** to everyone who believes...*

Introduction: No one likes to be scammed. But being embarrassed by making the wrong move or being taken advantage of by the unscrupulous, causing shame is as old as the beginning of time. Adam and Eve fell for the original lie, “*Did God really say?*”, causing them to question their own recollection and do what seemed easy, quick, and appealing. Today, scams are normative thanks to the proliferation of internet access and personal information being in the cyber sphere. How many people have received an email saying they owe money on an account they’ve never had, or an express pass on a freeway they’ve never been on, or on a purchase never made. How many have received a message compelling you to respond in a time sensitive way, or to give a seemingly innocuous piece of information, which would lead to access to personal information. Scammers will use **romance schemes**, like a woman named Rita who gave \$90,000 to a supposed celebrity who began a relationship with the ignorant 66 year old woman who was starved for attention.¹ Others will use a kidnapping ploy, saying they have a loved one, not to involve anyone else, and to transfer money.

At one level or another, from a bad purchase or a misguided decision, we have been scammed. The problem with the embarrassment and shame that follows is that we *move away from what is right and good*, and we’d rather live in silence than acknowledge the fault. Adam and Eve *hid themselves* from God, running away from Him after their sin rather than running toward Him. Shame causes us to hang our head, de-motivates us, and have the wrong view of ourselves. Shame can be a result of pride, and after shame takes over, we’d rather sink into the crowd than stand out.

This is why it is significant that Paul uttered the phrase, “***I am not ashamed of the gospel***” at the climax of his introduction, signaling not only what the gospel does, but the challenge we all face with the gospel. John Piper said that the “*gospel does two things: it brings out shaming behavior in those who will not believe it. And it gives freedom from shame to those who do believe it.*”² Keeping the gospel central in our lives is difficult, since there always pressure all around, but it is the pathway to both freedom and joy for our soul and effectiveness in our mission.

Gospel Driven Prayer & Thankfulness

Romans 1:8-10 “*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your **faith is proclaimed in all the world**. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in **the gospel of his Son**, that **without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers**, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.*”

Ironically, ***thanksgiving as a practice is often missed in a culture that lacks for little***. One would think that logic would demand that the MORE someone possessed, the MORE thankfulness would increase. But the opposite is often the case. The more we have, the more we can lose, and the more it whets our appetite, the larger the desire becomes. On top of this we play a comparison game with those around, seeing what they have ---- be it possessions, positions, or even families ---- and can long for those. In

¹ <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/saltlakecity/news/romance-scam-victim-tells-her-story-warns-others-to-be-vigilant>

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/not-ashamed-of-the-gospel>

fact, thanksgiving is the **antidote** to so many angst-driven sins: anger, anxiety, and fear all find their opposite to “put on” in thanksgiving. I recently talked to a friend who looked at their financial situation with fear and discouragement, but as we observed it objectively, it was a situation that most would LOVE to have. Instead of being thankful and content (contentment being the partner of thankfulness) with a situation, there was a lack of joy, which led to an overflow into marital strife. And we can know that **thankfulness and contentment** have nothing to do with the ACTUAL amount that we have, but rather how we VIEW what we have.

So when Paul **prayed** for churches, he often reported that **thankfulness** was a dominate topic (see Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3). The church at Rome was no exception. He gave thanks through the mediation of **Jesus Christ** because their faith was proclaimed throughout the world. What was happening in Rome was remarkable: *in perhaps the most polytheistic, idol-laden, and godless city in the entire known world at the time, the gospel of Jesus Christ shone through, changing lives among many ethnicities, socio-economic, and language barriers.* Paul’s thankfulness did not mean everything was perfect nor that they had everything worked out. That’s not how thankfulness operates. But it did mean that Paul gave thanks for what was most important to him. He was a “*worker for others joy*” (2 Cor. 1:24), and was willing to remain in this world for the progress and joy of others (Phil. 1:25) in Christ. *A lack of thankfulness often signals that our priorities are off, we value the wrong things, and believe that we are entitled to more. But more will never truly satisfy.*

Prayer itself is also a revealer of our maturity and health before the Lord. Paul said that “*without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers*”, which meant that though he had never met the people in the church he was writing to, his prayer FOR them was constant. It makes sense that Paul would pray for those that he trained and disciplined and for churches he planted, but this was a place he had not been and a people he did not have a personal relationship with. Paul’s prayer highlighted a couple of things:

- 1) **For Paul, his main prayer was driven for people, and particularly their spiritual standing –**
When there are physical needs, material uncertainty, and physical pain, it is good and right to pray. We should make all of our requests known to God (Phil. 4:4-7), but they should be given with thanksgiving and trust in the Lord. However, the prayer that consumed Paul was for the growth and maturation of those he loved and cared about, knowing that if that happened, everything else would line up properly. *Have you ever wondered ‘what’ to pray for regarding others or even your own kids?* If maturity is the goal, prayer like this will be ongoing:

Philippians 1:9-11 “*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*”

- 2) **For Paul, he did not let “out of sight” equal “out of mind” –** This one is personally convicting. It is so easy to wrapped up in the here and now that we neglect prayer for the here and then. He spent real time seeking the Lord’s face on behalf of those he **was not with**, and cared deeply for those he hadn’t met. Prayer is a conduit to caring for and growing in affection for others. We have the privilege of partnering with churches, pastors, and families throughout the country and the world, many who we will never meet, but whom we have an opportunity to pray for regularly.

- 3) **For Paul, prayer was a way of understanding and yielding to God's Will** – Paul made no bones about his desire: **he wanted to visit them**. But he always yielded his desires to the **will of God**. That meant that **his will and what he wanted was willingly submitted to God's**. So though he prayed, sought the LORD, and wanted to go, he saw that when circumstances disallowed him from getting there, he understood that was from the hand of God. Just because we pray for it, even when they are good requests, does not mean we get it, or get it in the timing we want.

Gospel Driven Focus & Ambition

Romans 1:11-15 *"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some **spiritual gift to strengthen you**— 12 that is, that we may be **mutually encouraged** by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 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. 14 I am under **obligation** both to **Greeks** and to **barbarians**, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

What was Paul's goal and ambition to get to Rome? We know that he ultimately wanted to get to Spain (Rom. 15; 24, 28), but **how** he got there was important. There are **two powerful and important reasons** he gave for praying to come to Rome, which gives the reason of "how" he was coming to them.

- 1) **To Be Mutually Encouraged in the gospel** (11-12) – There is some dispute as to what the "spiritual gift" was that Paul wanted to give, but most commentators agree that it was **Paul's understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ**.³ Notice that if his goal was to come and explain, teach, and revel in the gospel with the church in Rome, it would not only be for **strengthening** of their faith, but would be mutually encouraging. In other words, what Paul understood was that the gospel is NOT MERELY FOR UNBELIEVERS or for explaining salvation, but has implications for every believer, every day. Paul never veered too far from the transformational truths of salvation by grace, especially since the drift of our hearts is toward **works, or toward putting confidence in our flesh, or for self-justification**, so a focus on the work of Christ alone, by faith alone would be good for all. And Paul himself knew he needed it as well, especially to hear of how the gospel was working out among them.
- 2) **To Preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, of whom he was indebted** (13-15) – The word Paul uses for "obligation" here is the word "debt". He wanted to come to Rome to further the evangelistic work that had begun there, and wanted the opportunity to be used for the harvest. This was not for his own gain or some sort of power play, but Paul saw his life as one **called by God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles** (non-Jews) as well as his own brothers, the Jewish nation. Paul did not use the 'Debtors ethic' for motivation, meaning he was trying to pay off the grace given to him, but rather viewed his life as not his own, and that whether by his life or death, Christ would be honored (Phil. 1:20) and **not be ashamed**. *And notice what group he was targeting*. He wanted to reach ALL people, both **barbarians**, who would have been NON-GREEK speaking gentiles, and the Greeks, who would have had the universal language and schooling. Remember, Paul was raised as a Pharisee and Hebrew of Hebrews. He would have hated non-Jews. But in Christ, his goal was to preach to ALL. **John Piper again said it this way:**

³ Colin Kruse summarized the interpretation by saying it was supported by the fact that elsewhere Paul speaks of sowing 'spiritual seed' among people (1 Cor. 9:11) where what is meant is the preaching of the gospel, and of the 'spiritual blessings', first promised to the Jews, being experienced by Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 15:27). *"The Pillar NT Commentary on Romans", p. 62.*

*In other words, Paul's way of not being ashamed of the gospel was NOT that he could keep himself in the best light or that he had enough savvy that people always liked him and approved what he did. When Paul looked out on the **huge world of unbelief** in his day **he felt a debt to all. He didn't look with utter disdain on the pagans of his day.***

*Beware of doing this. **Our conservative lifestyle has been so politicized in America** that we slip easily into **feeling disdain** rather than **debt to unbelieving people**. Not so with Paul, though he hated sin. Rather, he felt so overwhelmed with undeserved grace that he knew himself a debtor to all — Greek and barbarian, wise and foolish.⁴*

Now, this article was written in 1998, far removed from the political maelstrom of our day, but the principle still plays. Paul knew his life was changed in the gospel, and knew he was called to bring it to those who were lost. **Did this mean it would be received well?** By no means! In fact, in 1 Cor. 1:20-25, Paul said that Jews thought the gospel was a stumbling block, and Gentiles thought it was the stuff of fools! Even believers thought Paul was crazy or wrong to preach a gospel that would cause him to end up in prison, which meant there were many who would leave him, unfriend him, and try to turn others away from him. The ministry of the gospel flourishes through the tears and pain of Christ's followers, and thinking that we will be well received by all is a huge misunderstanding. Paul endured beatings, stoning, dangers from every and all groups that he preached to, and the heart wrenching pain of disloyalty (2 Cor. 11:23-26). Knowing all of this, it is no wonder why some **shrink from the gospel, are embarrassed by it, or even can feel ashamed**. No one likes to look like a fool. No one likes rejection. No one likes to be made fun of. **So what drove Paul to keep going? What drove him to stand firm on a message that was going to be by-and-large rejected?** That is exactly what he addressed in the next section.

Gospel Driven Power & Boldness

Romans 1:16-17 *"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. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'."*

The culmination of Paul's introduction simultaneously gives the theme of the rest of the letter. He already gave the essence of the gospel in the first few verses, now he lays out the substance. There are **four distinct** aspects of the gospel that emboldened Paul in the gospel:

- 1) **He was not ashamed** – At first glance, this seems like a strange statement coming from Paul or any believer who has been transformed by the gospel. But given the fact that gospel ministry comes as a cost, it's not a far walk to take that being *ashamed of the gospel* is a challenge even believers face. This shame usually comes in the form of a **lack of engagement in evangelism and discipleship**, and though we wouldn't characterize it as such, being ashamed of it is a root cause. This usually takes the form of the following:
 - **I lack knowledge/don't know enough** – This is the #1, sanitized reason in Western churches. In our lack of confidence and boldness, we have professionalized disciple making, separating it out from worship and obedience and hoping someone else does it, especially a professional.
 - **I'm unworthy** – Unworthiness is actually foundational to successful interaction in the gospel. This was the basis of Paul's view of his Apostleship (1 Cor. 15:7-10)

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/not-ashamed-of-the-gospel>

- **I don't know the person well enough/I know them too well** – I can't risk the friendship
 - **Or any other sanitized reason that we give to stay away from the hard but life giving information about the gospel.**
- 2) **The Gospel IS the power of God for EVERYONE who believes** – Paul believed this, experienced this in his own life, and witnessed it in places like Corinth and Thessalonica. He saw people turn from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9-10). He saw people who lived lifestyles of sexual immorality, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, and drunkenness who became washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor. 6:9-11) There is nothing more powerful or effective to change lives and redeem eternal destinies like the gospel. **Salvation** here means “spiritual deliverance”, and encompasses the present but especially the future. The language Paul uses is that of a courtroom where all will stand before a Judge and give an account (Rom. 2:6), where no excuses will stand (3:19), and where no human work of the law will be justified (3:20).

And notice that salvation is open to EVERYONE on the simple basis of belief. This means that the same status applies for anyone, whether rich, poor, man or woman, raised in the church or not, regardless of ethnicity, family heritage, or tradition. The gospel is the power to save, where God will declare one righteous. Paul believed that the gospel is what moves someone from **death to life, darkness to light, and from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son**. In this he had hope in success, boldness in the message, and trust that God will save whomever He called.

- 3) **The Gospel REVEALS the righteousness of God** – We will delve into the question more, but a central question of the universe is: *How does a righteous God save fallen, sinful humanity without compromising His righteousness?* But what is revealed about His righteousness?

The righteousness of God is his saving action whereby he brings people into a right relationship with Himself.⁵ This absolutely comes out of His character, which is holy, pure, and righteous. David Peterson said, *“Righteousness is certainly an attribute of God, but the term is used to describe how God acts to establish justice for His people and put them right with Himself.”*⁶

And notice the fact that the **righteousness of God** is sandwiched between two concepts: the **power of God** and in verse 18, **the wrath of God**. Herein lies the reality. The gospel had to be effective in giving us a foreign righteousness to be made right with God because we were all under His **wrath**. This means that we are not simply *wounded, or mostly dead, or needing a push*. We are dead in our sin, cannot make ourselves alive, and need something or Someone to act on us. This is why the gospel of Jesus Christ is so amazing, because it is **His Work from beginning to the end, uncompromising and powerful**.

- 4) **How is this salvation received?** The same way in the Old Testament as it is in the New, with the object being clarified in the New: “The just, or righteous, shall live by faith”. This is a quote from **Habakkuk 2:4** and also used in **Galatians 3:11** and **Hebrews 10:38**. The point for OT Israel and for us today is the same. We are not saved by our *faithfulness or moral achievement*. We are saved in placing our total trust, dependence, and life in the work of Jesus Christ alone and **His faithfulness to be the just and justifier of our life**. This is why we call people to believe, to repent, and to follow. This is both a message that brings life in a radical, transforming way, and

⁵ Colin Kruse, p. 71.

⁶ David G Peterson, “Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary”, p. 106

brings out the vitriol of offense from people who are offended to learn they are sinners under God's wrath.

Martin Luther was trained, taught and practiced a theology and belief in salvation that came from the prescription, ***“Do what is in you”***. In other words, do you best, do what you can do (especially the sacraments of the church), and God will do the rest. Luther understood Romans 1:17 to mean that the righteousness of God was his righteous judgement, and the “just living by faith” meant proving oneself ***faithful*** by doing what they can. But because Luther was keenly aware of his sin, this thought terrified and terrorized him, until he studied Psalms and Romans completely. Then he realized:

“At last, by the mercy of God...I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. The doors of paradise swung open, and I walked through.”⁷

May we all understand, enjoy, and revel in the same understanding about the righteousness of God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, believed by faith.

⁷ Cited from Daniel Doriani *“Reformed Expository Commentary”*, p. 24-25.