

Read Romans 1

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. Romans 1:16

Have you ever been really embarrassed around someone? When I was about 10, my friend David came over one summer day. My mom was single and working, so I was home alone a lot and we didn't have a lot of money. There were some sodas in the fridge my mom said we could drink, and as we went to the fridge I tried to open the door real narrow so David couldn't see how little food was in it. He came over and pulled the door open and I felt like dying. He said "Don't worry about it man, that happens at my house sometimes too."

Shame can shut us up into a corner, and silence us. But when it comes to sharing the gospel, we can never allow shame to stop us. In fact, what do we have to be ashamed of? What are we afraid we'll be accused of? I've seen the gospel of Jesus change mean people. I've seen the gospel change uncaring people. When Jesus comes into someone's life, He will change them. Don't be afraid to share Jesus. It's His power that will do the work. **And you must remember...everyone without Jesus will go to Hell. Share the power without fear. Pray and ask God to give you readiness over shame. Remember when someone told you about Jesus Christ? You can be that person to someone else so pray and ask, "Who are you calling me to be a witness to today?"**

Read Romans 2

for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. Romans 2:13

As much as I loved baseball growing up, I just wasn't a solid player. Regardless, summer after summer saw me signing up and knowing that my opportunities to actually play would be few. Despite the reality, I came to every practice and played as hard as I could. Over time, we would begin to lose players who simply stopped showing up to practice or who showed little interest in actually being a part of the team. Sometimes, they had already paid for their uniforms and equipment, but walked away without ever contributing to the team they had previously been so excited to join with.

Hearing and doing are two different things. Our baseball coaches always told us to be at practice and put in our best efforts, but some people simply weren't doers. In the same way, Jesus is not calling for hearers, but doers. A genuine Christian commitment is not shown by praying to Christ, but by living for Him. **I expect someone who is a baseball player to understand the game, have the equipment, and is willing to get dirty while giving it their all. I expect a Christian to understand their salvation, seek to grow in Christ, and share that message with others. Are you merely hearing the Word of God, or are you actively obeying it? God prefers the doing over the hearing. What have you "heard" recently that you are unwilling to move into the "doing" category?**

Read Romans 3

as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; Romans 3:10

Working with World Changers in Canada was a tremendous experience. We had 150 participants helping people with housing needs all over the city, and the locals began taking notice. But in what way had they noticed? Often times they spoke of how good these teens are for taking their time and money and investing it in people they didn't know. Yes, that's a good thing. They pointed out these participants were sleeping on the floor of a local college and eating marginal cafeteria food. Yes, that appears to be the sacrifice of a good person. But the greater challenge was helping these locals understand that we don't seek to be good people, but godly people.

There is no good person anywhere in the world. Paul is reminding the Romans of this by citing a scripture from Psalm 14:3 (when you see a capitalized phrase in scripture, it's a clue the passage is quoted from elsewhere in the Bible). A Christian cannot be considered good, because ultimately his/her righteousness comes through Christ. The good things we do as believers come from the motivation that we have from Jesus to do them. The "good things" we do apart from Jesus are just stuff. So don't let anyone pump you up too much regarding your actions. **If it weren't for Jesus, we'd still be as selfish as we'd ever been, but with no recognition of how that selfishness is wrong. You are a sinner who still needs to walk daily with Jesus in order to live the life He's called you to. Church isn't enough. Church doesn't take up much time in our week...the call of Jesus on our lives should. Take time to recognize that no matter how long you've known Jesus and lived your life for Him, your righteousness still comes from His actions alone.**

Read Romans 4

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. Romans 4:2

No matter where I move, I'll always be a St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan. They were a huge part of my childhood, especially since my grandmother worked for Rawlings. She manufactured uniforms for the major league players and supplied me with all kinds of baseball goodies over the years. Recently I decided that I'd like to get a Cardinals hat, but was shocked at how expensive they were online. While searching some time back, I found a clearance section that had plenty of hats from the Cardinals 2006 World Series championship. They were selling for less than \$10, mainly because they were 5 years old and old championships lose their relevancy over time.

The work of man just doesn't last. The Bible is clear that if we are saved we have no right to act like we're better than the lost. Your salvation has nothing to do with you. You realized you were a sinner and you asked Jesus to save you, but He did the work on the cross. Did you know everyone in the Cardinals organization got a World Series ring that year? Even the secretaries. Did they do anything to help those guys win on the field? No. The guys on the field did the work, but everyone in the organization gets a benefit. It's the same with Jesus. He took the punishment. He did the work. **So what personal works are**

you holding in high regard? For what do you believe you deserve more praise? Let us recognize today that every good thing we are capable of comes as a result of God's willingness to grant those abilities.

Read Romans 5

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 5:8

When I need automotive work done, I don't always look for the cheapest prices. I've dealt with enough cars to know that even a new part can fail quicker than anticipated. So when buying tires or replacing major parts, I often wait for the places with the best guarantees. I don't just want tires; I want tires that I can bring back if they don't last for the life of the advertised tread wear. I don't just want my engine fixed, but I want a guarantee that the repair will be covered for the rest of the time I own the car. And more and more automotive repair companies are picking up customers by providing these types of guarantees.

God has provided us with a peace of mind guarantee in Christ. We are justified by faith, not by feelings. Does God become disappointed and angry with us at times? Yes, but even in the midst of those feelings His overarching characteristic is his love. My children upset me when they choose disobedience, but ultimately my love for them leads me to correct them over that disobedience. I want them to stop their wrong actions in order to have a better life. **Do you lack peace with God? Do you fear that God's thoughts towards you are mostly disappointment? Then reject whatever is causing you that guilt and simply repent. Christ died to give us peace so we could serve Him, instead of constantly worrying about whether His relationship to us would be permanent. But if peace continues to evade you, perhaps you need to evaluate whether you have personally repented to Jesus and asked for His salvation. He wants you to have peace of mind.**

Read Romans 6

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Romans 6:1-2

Is there anything better than being 16 and on your way to the DMV? My mom took me down in her old Ford Tempo to hopefully pass my driving test on my second attempt (I failed by 1 point on my first attempt). I studied hard and got myself ready, passing my second attempt with flying colors. Soon after I realized something about driving: all the stuff I had learned in the driving book was important to utilize. You have to keep space between the car in front of you so you can stop suddenly if needed. You have to signal ahead of your actual turn or you'll probably be rear-ended. A license to drive is not a license to drive in any fashion you want.

I have often thought of Paul's words here and taught them to teenagers in the form of a question: "Do we have a license to sin?" Paul has been making the point that we are saved and that Christ has paid the penalty for our sin. But does forgiveness give us a right to live as we did before knowing Jesus? Paul is screaming an adamant NO! In fact, forgiveness is what allows us to live the new life in Jesus. Like Bro. Ralph used to say

back in my college church, “You’ll never be sinless, but you should sin less.” What a great summary of Paul’s statement. Is sin forgiven? Yes. Should you ignore your sin then? No. **Think about your own life? What sins are you writing off under the forgiveness of Jesus and rejecting any change in your life? Jesus made us to be a new creation, and yet we often choose the old. What has that ever gotten us? What benefit have you ever received from sin that was worth the guilt and disconnect from God? Maybe we need to check our wallets...there is no license to sin in there.**

Read Romans 7

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. Romans 7:19

Being a regular runner has not been the easiest task. During our a mission trip early in my career, I knew I needed to run in order to stay in shape and habit. As my designated running day was drawing to a close, someone asked if I was going to run. I told them I was just going to do it tomorrow, to which he responded, “Yeah, I’ll bet.” Well that was pretty motivating. I knew there was a good chance that talking myself out of it one day, could turn into two. So I laced up my shoes and took off that evening and after finishing up, I knew it was exactly what I needed to do.

We all know what we need to do, and yet we frequently choose the opposite. Even Paul in his amazing relationship with God experienced the same frustrations with sin as us. He knew what He wanted to do, but he found himself easily distracted during his mission work and his daily life lived out for God. But even in this admission, Paul is again pointing us to the necessity and powerful nature of God’s grace in response to our faith. **What do you know God is saying yes to for your life that you are saying no to? What do you know God is saying no to for your life that you are saying yes to? While Paul says this is a tremendous struggle, that doesn’t give us right or permission to simply choose failure.**

Read Romans 8

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

We went down to one car in the summer of 2006. On my way to seminary one morning, a car stopped suddenly in front of me and I plowed into the back of them. Their car was barely damaged, but my car was completely totaled. Do you know what that was? A blessing. I had been thinking of selling the car so that I could finance the rest of seminary. When the settlement from my insurance company came in, it was slightly more than I had prayed for and covered the remainder of my seminary education, allowing me to graduate without any debt. Even in the midst of an auto accident, God worked it out to provide for us.

When difficult situations happen in your life, pray that God will show you the purpose. You will deal with difficult co-workers at a job. Ask God how to handle that. You will deal with difficult family relationships. Ask God how to handle that. You may deal with the disappointment of someone who was your hero, turning out to be someone totally different than you thought. Ask God how to handle that. He works all things for good, but

we must be patient to see what God is doing, seeking His purposes for you. **Times of difficulty are not times to distance yourself from God, but to grow with Him more than ever. Don't just pray for the situations you're currently in: pray for the situations that you will be facing in the near future.**

Read Romans 9

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race Romans 9:3

Sean was a guy in my high school church youth group. He had a serious girlfriend from the time I got there, right up to 3 years later. After those three years, his girlfriend decided that she was done with the relationship and broke it off with Sean. Finding him after that was tough. He was a bit older and had a car, and he was never at church anymore. We were worried about him, but didn't know how to help. Sean turned to alcohol and drugs which ultimately lead to him dying way too young.

We didn't do much to help Sean as I look back. His parents had the ultimate responsibility for him, but I regret that my friends and I didn't make more of an effort to reach out to him. We didn't pray for him or stop at his house to encourage him and bring him back to church. If you really have a concern for someone, you'll be willing to make big sacrifices. Paul felt a sincere heartache for the Jewish people, of which he was a part. He said he would give up his salvation if all the nation of Israel would accept. That's a strong love and concern for people. It's the kind that will build a church up. You can't turn in your salvation, and you can't make people love Jesus. But you can give them a chance when you share the Gospel. **Every time we fail to take an opportunity to share the gospel, we must remember that person is more likely on their way to Hell than Heaven according to the Bible (Matthew 7:14). Will you commit to impact at least one person with the gospel in this next week? Paul was willing to give up his salvation for others to hear. Are you willing to simply give up a moment of your time and heart to invest the gospel in someone?**

Read Romans 10

for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. Romans 10:10

My son Tyler loved legos and anything lego related when he was younger. As he got into more involved sets, we often put them together step by step, working up to a complicated-looking robot my mom gave him. We were about 5 steps from being finished when we realized he had lost a piece. After searching for a while, Tyler decided we could just do without it. Unfortunately, it joined with another small piece to work as a hinge. I explained that just using the piece he had and ignoring the one he had lost wouldn't work. He tried anyway, but realized his robot just wouldn't function properly with pieces missing.

Paul indicates here that belief and confession are both a necessary part of salvation. A belief you fail to confess is no belief at all. A confession with no belief also fails the test. Salvation comes from a life that is lived out AS a confession of belief. As a result, even a mute person can confess their belief! Yet there are many who confess to be Christians

that may as well be unable to speak. To say that you believe in Jesus is not enough. You must live like Jesus: selfless, Father-focused, kingdom driven. You will talk to people about Jesus who say they believe in Him, but they have no true outward confession. Or you will meet people who confess it outwardly through attempted good works, but the heart is clearly not right. **When communicating the gospel, be sure to help people understand that we don't do good works to get to God. We do good works because God got to us. Our confession and belief is in His work. Not a bad thing for us to remember as believers. We will never impress God by doing what we're supposed to do.**

Read Romans 11

For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Romans 11:34

A soccer coach's response to a player's parent: Thank you for your interest in our coaching procedures for your 5-year-old's recent soccer game. I apologize that I am an "idiot" and left that player standing in front of our goal. He is called a "goalie" and his job is to keep the other team from scoring. However, I could see how "moronic" that must have appeared when I didn't have him trying to score goals. My assumption is that you've played and watched very little soccer, and I've only been playing and coaching for about 20 years. In spite of your obvious ignorance of the game, I will try to do a better job of listening to your suggestions from the stands. Sincerely, Coach Doofus.

It's amazing how we can know very little at times and still feel the need to throw in our two cents. We often fall into this trap as we try to reason God into making a decision other than the one He has clearly already made. If you feel that He is leading you to share your faith more, don't tell him all the reasons you can't do it. If your marriage is difficult, don't lay out for him how He messed up in selecting your mate. **God doesn't have advisors. He doesn't ask for input on decisions. He asks for obedience. Don't hate the tough times. Be thankful that God trusts you enough to allow you to go through them. Instead of telling God what needs to be done on His part, start asking Him what needs to be done on your part.**

Read Romans 12

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: Romans 12:6

Dennis Rodman was both a tremendous head case and a tremendous talent. He was one of the greatest rebounders in the history of the NBA and proved the old motto, "You can make it as a pro if you can do just one thing really well." Rodman was terrific at collecting rebound and loose balls, you didn't want to see the guy dribble or shoot. I remember one particular game he played with the Chicago Bulls. He rebounded the ball, dribbled down the floor, didn't pass it to Michael Jordan, and shot a terrible 3-pointer that missed the entire goal. He wasn't willing in that moment to enjoy his role.

Like Rodman, we have our strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes our weaknesses are things that God wants us to work on (i.e. sharing our faith). Other times, those weaknesses are areas for others around us are to display their strengths. I know that

hospitality is a weakness of mine, so to have a wife and church members who are strong in that area is a blessing to my life. Each of us, in Jesus Christ, has received a gift that God wants us to use in serving Him (look in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 for some of these gifts). **So what has God equipped you to do, and how are you doing it? Are you worrying more about what you can't do than what you can? This is an effective tool of the devil where it appears you're thinking on spiritual things, but you're just being envious and prideful. Where do you need to be exercising your gifts here at FBC?**

Read Romans 13

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. Romans 13:14

Every October, our family would load our horses up and go to Southeast Missouri for a trail ride. This required several nights of camping out, so we had to be extremely precise in our lists. There was tons of gear from feed bags to bridles that we had to load up for the horses. And of course, we needed our tents, cheap soda, a cubic ton of marshmallows, and plenty of other provisions brought along in order to make the trip enjoyable.

Do you sometimes make provision to help sin happen in your life? It's amazing how quickly we can find ourselves doing the "evil I don't want." It happens though when we make provision or provide opportunities for sin. If you know that being in a certain area makes you likely to commit sin, don't go there. If you know being with certain people makes you likely to commit sin, don't be around them. If you are in the planning mode, you have gone much further than just accidentally falling into sin. Every day you have to put on Jesus. Galatians says to wear His character like a piece of clothing (Galatians 3:27). In doing so, truly you are reminded of His constant presence in your life. But, you must do it every day. **Stop making plans for sin, and start making plans for Him. If you do this, you will find yourself less taken by guilt, and find yourself happier in knowing you are serving the Lord you confess to love. Where does your provision for sin need to cease?**

Read Romans 14

For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself Romans 14:7

Charles Fisher was a Christian who attempted to live his life for Jesus on a daily basis. When he was close to death he told his pastor and son that at his funeral he wanted them to press play on a tape recorder he gave them. Soon Charles died and everyone showed up to the funeral. The son walked up and placed the tape recorder on the pulpit, put the microphone to it, and pressed play. Everyone in the church heard "Hey, this is Charles, and I'm up here in Heaven, and it is great. I want every one of you to be here with me one day, and here is how to do it." Charles went on to share the gospel and is probably the only person to ever preach his own funeral!

Both in life and death, Charles lived for Jesus. Paul points out that we cannot live or die for ourselves. Every Christian belongs to God in life and death. In life, God expects you to make decisions that show you belong to Him. And when you die, God keeps his promise to take you to Heaven with Him. Too many Christians are waiting for death,

thinking that's when the Christian life starts. If that's what you think, you'll be standing before God as someone who has little to show for a life that God planned great things for. Don't wait to cash in your faith when you die, but let it affect how you live today. **Are you living for eternity, or a paycheck? Are you making decisions on how it will affect you tomorrow, or how it affects others for eternity? We don't live for ourselves, and we certainly don't die for ourselves. Jesus owns all of our moments, including those we have right now.**

Read Romans 15

**Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.
Romans 15:7**

Being in a mixed family is often hard. When my mom remarried for the third time, I suddenly had a host of new siblings, grandparents, and uncles. It all seemed very odd and visiting my step-dad's family for our first Christmas together seemed like it would be a nightmare. I felt like the new pet that had just been picked up, but I was never treated that way. My dad's family opened their arms to me and made me feel like I had always belonged. After my mom and step-dad divorced, I pulled away because I didn't think my relationship to them was relevant anymore. After many lost years, these family members have shown me I was wrong.

We can often be slow to provide acceptance. For so many people, that's all they're looking for, and as Christians we should be willing to provide it. New believers can come from a host of areas. Maybe they grew up in a Christian home or maybe they were saved during a prison sentence. No matter what, they deserve our acceptance because there is not a single person Jesus has ever said no to. **Take a look around our church family. Who is trying to earn your acceptance? Do you realize that you should be helping to graft them into God's family? This entire chapter is about accepting fellow believers for the benefit of God's work. Remember, when Paul was a new believer, those who already were believers wanted to keep him out. But Barnabas came and vouched for him, which helped Paul to become everything God desired from his life. Who around you could use a little acceptance today?**

Read Romans 16

**Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.
Romans 16:17**

Holy Creek Baptist Church suffered division when people took sides on a major issue: the placement of the piano bench. The sanctuary hosted an older piano that served more as decoration, and the piano bench had been moved to another position within the room. Such a controversy occurred, that an outside pastor had to be brought in to mediate. Eventually the church agreed to bring in a separate pastor to help lead a second service with the bench moved. Why any pastor would agree to such silliness is beyond me.

Dissension has no place in the church. In fact, if you read through the epistles of the New Testament, you will find that the sin most often warned of was dissension and division. The young church had absolutely no room or place for it, and neither does the Christian

life for that matter. We must be watchful of division makers. These people will disregard the biblical teachings of the pastor or other leadership in order to hold history and tradition above all else. **We must be wary of two things in our lives: not to be these people and not to support these people. The only issues in which dissension should even be considered is if spiritual heresy or gross immorality is occurring within the church walls. Other than that, there are few issues for which a church should ever consider allowing division to destroy their ministry and testimony. Are you supporting any divisive talk?**