

Not Ashamed

Romans 1:16-17 (NLT) For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes – the Jew first and also the Gentile. ¹⁷ This Good News tells us how God makes us right in His sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life.'" (Habakkuk 2:4b)

I read a message this week, that challenged my thinking about Paul's statement here at the beginning of his letter to the Romans (Alan Carr, Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Lenior, NC). I want to share some of it with you this morning. Let's start by understanding some of the context in which this letter was written.

The verses we read are part of a letter that Paul wrote to the folks living in Rome sometime between 57 and 58 AD. Remember that Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire who controlled Israel from around 63 BC until 359 AD when the Roman Empire was divided into the eastern and western empires with the eastern half became known as the Byzantine Empire. Although the rulers were Roman, much of the culture was Greek. And the Romans took many of the Greek gods, changed their names, and made them their own.

So, Rome was the great capital of the Roman Empire. It was full of images of power. In fact, the power of the Roman empire was evident everywhere one looked in the capital. The military strength was demonstrated to the point that no one could miss it.

But what made Rome a place where people might be quiet and not talk about God or about the Good News as Paul called it? There are at least four reasons why people might have kept quiet, and I think that we might be able to connect with those today.

The first reason has to do with the moral conditions of that day. Nero was the Emperor of Rome, and he was a very evil man. The city of Rome itself was full of rebellion against God. In fact, Paul talks about some of the things going on in Rome. He says that people thought they were wise claiming that there was no God despite the fact that everything they could see was created by God. The people there were making up their own gods and making idols that looked like people and all sorts of reptiles. They worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator Himself. They were doing whatever shameful things their hearts desired, and as a result, were degrading their own bodies. They traded the way God made them to do absolutely shameful things with each other. Then Paul said that their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior and gossip. They became haters of God, insolent (rude), proud, and boastful and invented new ways of sinning. They disobeyed parents, were heartless and had no mercy. – Wow, it sounds like a page right out of today's social media, the newspaper or the evening news! My goodness, human nature hasn't changed! So, some may have stayed quiet because of the moral conditions.

Then there's a second reason why Paul might have kept quiet. Paul was a Jew, and in those days, Jews were considered to be sub-human. They were despised, mistreated and enslaved. They were kicked around and blamed for all the problems in the world.

Again, it sounds like what's going on today. Jews are hated in many parts of the world and even our own nation. Antisemitism has increased exponentially. They are blamed for things that they have nothing to do with. The world talks and acts as though Israel has no right to defend itself, and yet, there's not a nation on earth that would have allowed a massacre of their own people like the nation of Israel experienced in 2023. Every nation would have responded by bombing the aggressors into oblivion. Look what the United States did after 911!

And Jews even in our nation and on our campuses are being harassed for no legitimate reason. Most folks don't even know what the phrase "from the river to the sea" means. Many of them just hate the Jews and have believed that the Jews are occupying a land that never belonged to them.

The truth of the matter is that God promised that very land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's descendants. They lived there. David and Solomon ruled there about 3,000 years ago. And archeology is proving that they have lived there for all that time. The land of Israel was never a Palestinian state. Jerusalem was never their capital. The land came under the control of Rome and was renamed from "Israel" to Palestine because Rome was angry that the Jews had risen up to try to throw off the Roman rule.

The third reason why someone might have remained quiet about the Good News is because what Paul preached was so incredible and almost beyond belief. Paul preached that the Savior was a male member of the despised Jewish race, and that this Jesus, claimed to be the Son of God. After all, this Jesus died in a very shameful way because He died on a Roman cross, the very symbol of shame. Yet, Paul preached that in dying this shameful death, Jesus claimed to have died for lost sinners. To top it off, Paul preached that Jesus rose from the dead three days after He was crucified, proving that He is the Son of God!

Who in the world would believe such a bizarre story? The truth of the matter is that the Good News is a difficult message for prideful people to actually accept. And things haven't changed. It's still true today.

The fourth reason why someone might shy away from declaring the truth of the Good News is that everywhere Paul went preaching this information about Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection, Paul was ridiculed, thrown out of town, arrested and thrown in prison or treated cruelly. Let me name some of those instances: He was imprisoned in Philippi; he was chased out of Thessalonica; he was smuggled out of Berea; he was mocked in Athens; he was called a fool in Corinth; he was stoned in Galatia; and he was rejected by the religious leaders in Jerusalem who declared that he subverted truth.

But despite all of this, Paul declared very forcefully that he wanted to make sure that everyone knew exactly where he stood. He wanted everyone to recognize that we have Good News that we need to be proud of. Paul's message is one that we need to tell everyone about, without any shame or fear.

Paul declares that the Good News is the "power of God at work". The Greek word is "dunamis" which means "might, energy, force". It's the same word from which we get the word "dynamite". This power is the energy, the force, the strength that are part of who God is.

God could have revealed His power against sin in any way that He chose. He could have wiped people off the face of the earth like He did in the time of Noah. He could have done anything He wanted to do because He is the all-powerful God. He created atoms and neutrons and electricity and everything we see and know. And it is incredible that He exercised His power to do something about sin, rebellion against Him. What did God do? He used His power to send people the Good News.

And nowhere is the power of God as visible as it is in the Good News of Jesus, the Messiah! Think about it for a moment. When God takes a rebellious individual and forgives all his rebellion by applying His grace and then makes the individual a new person, that's very powerful! God could have sent us all to hell, but instead, He chose to send His love wrapped up in His Son, Jesus.

So how is the Good News from God different from other types of good news? Well, there is the "good news of religion" that says, "just turn over a new leaf." Then there's the "good news of materialism" that says, "your worth is determined by what you have. Getting more is the goal of life." And you

have the "good news of social liberalism or progressive religious thought" that says, "I'm ok and you're ok. God accepts us like we are and will take us to heaven if heaven really exists." How about the "good news of society" that says, "do what makes you happy because life is short?"

But Paul's message says, "You are a sinner, and if you die in your sins, you will go to hell. However, God loves you and sent His Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins and the sins of the whole world. He died but then rose from the dead! If you will place your faith in Him, then you can and will be saved from the wrath of God."

See the Good News of Jesus is a simple message. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul writes, "I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and He was raised on the third day, just as the Scriptures said." And Romans 4:25 tells us that Jesus was "handed over to die because of our sins, and He was raised to life to make us right with God." Very simple; even a child can understand!

Paul was changed by the power of this Good News. He was changed forever when Jesus came to him as Paul was going to Damascus to arrest all the Jews who believed that Jesus was the Son of God. And everyone that is redeemed by the Good News of God's grace is changed forever! God changes the direction we are headed. He changes the things we desire. He changes us because of His great mercy and grace.

Why did God go to such lengths for rebellious sinners? Why did He allow His son to be abused, ridiculed, beaten and die for this crazy purpose? The real answer is simply that He loves us. Add to that the fact that His plan and purpose was to give people a way back into His family. He wanted to give us peace, joy, happiness, freedom from guilt and shame. He wanted to change our destination in eternity from hell to heaven and give us a great life. I don't know about you, but I am so glad God has forgiven me based on Jesus' sacrifice! I'm so glad that He saves me as I walk with Him!

There's a very clear way that Paul lays out for us so that we can each one know for sure that we are forgiven. The end of verse 16 says, "saving everyone who believes". There is no way that we can save ourselves through religious rituals or religious exercises. But, what does it mean "to believe"? It means that I am so convinced of something that it changes my behavior. Because I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and I confess my sins, God forgives me! He gives me new life! I don't want to go back to the old things that I did. I don't want to act as though Jesus' sacrifice was nothing. I want to follow Him, learn from Him, and step where He steps. I want to reflect His character more than anything else in the world.

Now look at verse 17, "This Good News tells us how God makes us right in His sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, 'It is by faith that a righteous person has life.'" Salvation is the product of faith in God, believing that He will do what He says, since He gave up His only Son so that I could be forgiven.

And perhaps, because we don't have to do great and wonderful things in order to receive this salvation, perhaps this is where folks get lost. We have a tendency to think that we can do it all by ourselves. But salvation is from God, all of it. Salvation comes to the individual who is willing to simply receive the message of Jesus by trusting that it is totally true. John 3:16 reminds us that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. Anyone who would believe in Him, the Son, would not be cut off from God but would have eternal life with Him.

And this simple message of the Good News is for everyone! Paul wrote that it was to the Jew first and then also to the Gentile. God gave the Good News to the Jew first because He promised Abraham that one of his descendants would be the one who would bless the entire world. And Jesus is that descendant that God was talking about. Jesus was born of a young Jewish woman named

Mary. Her fiancé became His step-father. He grew in wisdom and the knowledge of God in a Jewish home. He lived in the land God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And His followers were Jewish.

God loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so much that He wanted all their descendants to be saved. And Jesus declared that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Him!

But God didn't limit it to just folks from the 12 tribes of Israel (Jacob). He opened it up for everyone and sent Paul to tell the whole world that salvation is available to anyone and everyone. No one is excluded. It doesn't matter your skin color, where you were born, where you live, or what you've done, this Good News is for every one of us!

The product of this Good News is that we, by the blood of Jesus, are made righteous through faith in Him. Many times, we think that we are good enough on our own. But God says that not one of us is righteous in our own selves. What saves us and makes us righteous – brings us into right standing with God – is when we place our faith in the Good News and we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Then, what we cannot do by ourselves, God does by His power.

We have been given the Good News that is worth believing and worth sharing! And I must ask you:

Are you trusting in the Good News of Jesus for your salvation?

Do you know that your rebellion, your sins, have been forgiven?

Are you telling others about the Good News or are you ashamed of this Good News of Jesus?

The same message that was able to give salvation back then, can do it now. The same power that worked in Paul's day is still working in our day. All we need to do is believe it, accept it, walk in it, and share it. We don't need to modify it or make any changes to it.

Will you believe on the Lord Jesus, the Anointed, One and be saved? Please stand with me.