Ashamed of the Gospel
Scripture: Romans 1
Code: BQ8311

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)

The introductory phrase **for I am not ashamed of the gospel** adds a final mark of spiritual service to those presented in verses 8–15, the mark of unashamed boldness.

Paul was imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Damascus and Berea, laughed at in Athens, considered a fool in Corinth, and declared a blasphemer and lawbreaker in Jerusalem. He was stoned and left for dead at Lystra. Some pagans of Paul's day branded Christianity as atheism because it believed in only one God and as being cannibalistic because of a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper.

But the Jewish religious leaders of Jerusalem did not intimidate Paul, nor did the learned and influential pagans at Ephesus, Athens, and Corinth. The apostle was eager now to preach and teach the gospel in Rome, the capital of the pagan empire that ruled virtually all the known world. He was never deterred by opposition, never disheartened by criticism, and never **ashamed**, for any reason, **of the gospel** of Jesus Christ. Although that **gospel** was then, and still is today, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, it is the only way God has provided for the salvation of men, and Paul was both overjoyed and emboldened by the privilege of proclaiming its truth and power wherever he went.

Although every true believer knows it is a serious sin to be ashamed of his Savior and Lord, he also knows the difficulty of avoiding that sin. When we have opportunity to speak for Christ, we often do not. We know the gospel is unattractive, intimidating, and repulsive to the natural, unsaved person and to the ungodly spiritual system that now dominates the world. The gospel exposes man's sin, wickedness, depravity, and lostness, and it declares pride to be despicable and works righteousness to be worthless in God's sight. To the sinful heart of unbelievers, the gospel does not appear to be good news but bad (cf. my comments in chapter 1), and when they first hear it they often react with disdain against the one presenting it or throw out arguments and theories against it. For that reason, fear of men and of not being able to handle their arguments is doubtlessly the single greatest snare in witnessing.

It is said that if a circle of white chalk is traced on the floor around a goose that it will not leave the circle for fear of crossing the white mark. In a similar way, the chalk marks of criticism, ridicule, tradition, and rejection prevent many believers from leaving the security of Christian fellowship to witness to the unsaved.

The so-called health and wealth gospel that has swept through much of the church today is not offensive to the world because it offers what the world wants. But that spurious gospel does not offer **the gospel** of Jesus Christ. Like the false teaching of the Judaizers, it is “a different gospel,” that is, not the gospel at all but an ungodly distortion (Gal. 1:6–7). Jesus strongly condemned the motives of worldly success and comfort, and those who appeal to such motives play right into the hands of Satan.

A scribe once approached Jesus and said, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” Knowing the man was unwilling to give up his comforts in order to be a disciple, the Lord answered, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:19–20). Shortly after that, “another of the disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.’ ” The phrase “bury my father” did not refer to a funeral service but was a colloquialism for awaiting the father’s death in order to receive the inheritance. Jesus therefore told the man, “Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead” (vv. 21–22).

Geoffrey Wilson wrote, “The unpopularity of a crucified Christ has prompted many to present a message which is more palatable to the unbeliever, but the removal of the offense of the cross always renders the message ineffective. An inoffensive gospel is also an inoperative gospel. Thus Christianity is wounded most in the house of its friends” (*Romans: A Digest of Reformed Comment* [Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1976], p. 24).

Some years ago I spoke at a youth rally, after which the wife of the rally director approached me. Expressing an unbiblical mentality that is common in the church today, she said, “Your message offended me, because you preached as if all of these young people were sinners.” I replied, “I’m glad it came across that way, because that is exactly the message I wanted to communicate.”

Paul’s supreme passion was to see men saved. He cared nothing for personal comfort, popularity, or reputation. He offered no compromise of the gospel, because he knew it is the only power available that can change lives for eternity.

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