

April 22, 2015

## The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Romans 1:16-17 (NASB), **“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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’”**

Yesterday afternoon my wife and I were visited by three young Mormon missionaries. We had a very lively discussion as we stood with them in our driveway and by God’s grace we were able to share a bit of the gospel with them. One of the young men told us that there are 88,000 Mormon missionaries worldwide. That number astounded me and caused no small amount of shame in my own heart over Christian’s general unwillingness to share the gospel with those closest to them. These three young men have taken two years out of their lives to spread a completely false message and yet we who as Paul says, have a message that is **“for salvation to everyone who believes”** make excuse after excuse not to share the good news.

As we continue our walk through Romans 1 we come to what is really the thesis statement of the entire book of Romans. These two verses contain the most life-changing truth God has put into men’s hands. To understand and positively respond to this truth is to have one’s time and eternity completely altered. These words summarize the gospel of Jesus Christ, which Paul then proceeds to unfold and explain throughout the rest of this book.

Paul begins verse 16 with, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel...”** This really adds the final mark of what true spiritual service looks like. This is the mark of unashamed boldness.

Paul was imprisoned in Philippi, run out of Thessalonica, he was smuggled out of Damascus and Berea, laughed out of Athens, considered foolish in Corinth, and declared a blasphemer and law breaker in Jerusalem. He was stoned and left for dead in Lystra. Some Pagans in that time considered Christianity akin to atheism because it believed in only one God. Virtually every other belief system was polytheistic. They also considered the followers of Christ to be cannibalistic because of a misunderstanding of the Lord’s Supper.

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem didn’t intimidate the apostle Paul though, neither did the learned and influential pagans of Ephesus, Athens, and Corinth. Paul was eager to preach and teach the gospel in Rome, the capital of the pagan empire that ruled virtually all of the known world at that time. 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 for the Jew 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 the truth and power of the gospel wherever he went.

Every true believer knows that it is a serious sin to be ashamed of our Lord and Savior; they also know the difficulty of avoiding that sin. When we have the opportunity to speak for Christ, we often do not. We are all guilty of this at one time or another. We know the gospel is unattractive intimidating, and repulsive to the “**natural**,” unsaved person and to the ungodly spiritual system that dominates our world. The gospel exposes mankind’s sinfulness, wickedness, depravity, and complete lost state with Christ. The gospel declares pride to be utterly despicable and works based righteousness to be worthless in the eyes of God. To the sin filled heart of the non-believer, the gospel does not appear to be good news but rather bad news. When the non-believer first hears the message of the gospel they often react with disdain which is directed toward the person who is presenting it and they will throw all kinds of arguments and irrational theories against it. For this reason the fear of men and of not being able to handle the arguments against the gospel keep many Christians from witnessing to those who are not saved.

It is said of geese that if you draw a line of white chalk around them on the floor that they will not leave the circle that you have drawn out of fear of crossing the white line. We Christians are very similar to the geese in that the chalk marks of criticism, ridicule, tradition, and rejection prevent many believers from leaving the security of fellowship to witness to the unsaved out in the world. We are very comfortable in our Christian communities of fellowship.

Instead of sharing the gospel, we share a version of the gospel that appeals to the world. The health and wealth gospel which unfortunately has swept through much of the church today is not offensive to the world, in fact it appeals to the world because it appeals to what sinful man wants. But this is not the “**gospel**” of Jesus Christ. Like the false teaching Judaizers of Paul’s day this is a “**different gospel**,” that is, not the gospel at all but an ungodly distortion of it. In Galatians 1:6-7 Paul writes, “**I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.**” Jesus strongly condemned the motives of worldly success and comfort, and those who appeal to these motives today play right into the hands of the great deceiver.

In Matthew 8:19-20 a scribe approaches Jesus and says to Him, “**Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.**” Jesus said to him, “**The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.**” Then shortly after that in verses 21-22 it says, “**Another of the disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.’**” This phrase, “**bury my father**” didn’t refer to a funeral service but rather it referred to waiting for his father to die so he could get ahold of the inheritance. Jesus therefore tells the man, “**Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead.**”

Geoffrey Wilson in *Romans: A Digest of Reformed Commentary* says, “**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 is also an inoperative gospel. Thus Christianity is wounded most in the house of its friends.”**

John MacArthur shares the following story: “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.’”

Friends, the apostle Paul’s supreme passion and desire was to see men and women saved. He could have cared less for personal comfort, popularity, or reputation. He offered absolutely no compromise of the gospel, because he knew it is the only power available that can change the lives of people for all eternity.