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Theological Convictions For No-Shame Sharing, Part 1

Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Alexamenos¹

On the Palatine Hill in Rome, a rather interesting picture was discovered which dates back to the 3rd century AD. The drawing was obviously done by a youth. It is a picture of a boy bowing before a cross with a crucified donkey on it. The inscription reads, "Alexamenos worships his God."



Truly, the incarnation of God is ridiculous to the world it was to the Romans. As Paul said...

¹ Taken from "Evangelism in the Early Church," Michael Green, page 174.

1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness...”²

And it is in our day. Liberals call the gospel, “Slaughter-house religion.” Intellectuals call the gospel, “A religion for mindless fools.” And most if not all unbelievers find that a gospel which speaks of sin, blood, self-denial, and death is quite unimpressive!

What therefore is our response? Boldness? Zealousness? Eagerness? Too often it is not! Rather, it is shame and embarrassment. When we should speak, we don’t. When we should be bold, we aren’t. When we should be salt and light, we hide!

You see we are afraid of what people might think, say, or do. And so we shrink back. Yet we do so with misgiving for we are ever mindful that it is God’s will for us to bring the glorious message of Christ to the nations! From the very beginning God commanded His people:

Genesis 12:2, “...so you shall be a blessing [to the nations].”

Again, this is not a promise, but a command! And 1800 years later, Christ repeated this exhortation:

Matthew 28:19, “...make disciples of all the nations...”

Acts 1:8b, “...you shall be My witnesses...”

Truly we have been charged to bring the message of Christ to a world which considers the message the epitome of folly. And that is why when we come across a passage like the one before us, a passage where a weak and sinful Christian explains why he wasn’t ashamed of the gospel, we sit up and take note. How is it that Paul wasn’t “ashamed of the gospel”?

Recall the term, “the gospel” was a buzz word in Rome. It primarily meant, “the celebration of the accession, or birth, of a king or emperor.”³ From this we see, in the words of R. C. Sproul’s *Tabletalk*⁴ that...

“...the Christian message was essentially political in that it stood against the claims of the would-be savior-state. Christ, not Caesar, is Lord of all. The Caesar cult demanded loyalty and honor; Christians said that such honor was to be rendered only to Christ, the King of kings.”

As such, the gospel of Christ not only upset the world, it also made the Christian an enemy of the state/world system of the 1st century. Accordingly, on account of the gospel Paul was...

- Smuggled out of Damascus and Berea, Acts 9:23-25.
- Stoned and left for dead at Lystra, Acts 14:19.
- Severely beaten and imprisoned in Philippiansippi, Acts 16:22-24.
- Chased out of Thessalonica, Acts 17:5-10ff.

² Compare also 1 Corinthians 2:14

³ Steve Schlissel, *Tabletalk*, July 2002, page 53.

⁴ Steve Schlissel, *Tabletalk*, July 2002, page 53.

- Laughed at in Athens, Acts 17:18, 32.
- Considered a fool in Corinth, Acts 18:6, 12-18a.
- Rioted against in Ephesus, Acts 19:23-30.
- Declared a blasphemer and lawbreaker in Jerusalem, Acts 21:30-36.

Yet in and through it all, he wasn't ashamed! So how is it that Paul didn't shrink back when it came to proclaiming a message which caused him so much trial and grief? How is it that Paul boldly spoke this "message of folly" to the intellectual capital of his day, Athens? How is it that he wanted also to bring this gospel to Rome- a city hostile to any gospel outside of a message of well-being regarding an emperor?

Paul's Conviction

Paul was bold when it came to the gospel, NOT on account of any inherent strength on his part, BUT because of his CONVICTION over what the Gospel is! Notice Paul states:

Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel for..."

Romans 1:16-17 gives us four reasons or convictions for Paul's lack of shame or intimidation when it came to preaching the Gospel. In this segment we are going to look at the first two convictions. Notice the first reason Paul wasn't ashamed of the gospel: He was not ashamed on account of the nature of the gospel.

The Nature of the Gospel

Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God."

The gospel is "the ability of God!" The idea behind this word is that of inherent capability or the ability to perform that which is desired. We get our English word dynamite from it. Now, what significance did the concept of "power" hold for Paul? What significance should this phrase hold for us?

To answer this we must go to the Scriptures and see how "power of God" is used. And when we do this we discover that "power of God" just isn't any 'ol phrase denoting ability. Rather, it denotes an unstoppable, unthwartable force. For example, it is BY "the power of God" that...

- The world was created, Jeremiah 10:12; 27:5.
- The lost are redeemed, Psalms 106:8-9; 77:15.
- The world is upheld, 1 Peter 1:5; Hebrews 1:3.
- Christ, who Himself is identified as the "power of God" in 1 Corinthians 1:24...
 - Was born, Luke 1:35.
 - Lived, Hebrews 7:16.
 - Performed miracles⁵ in which He...
 - Cast out demons, Mark 5:1; Luke 4:36.
 - Healed sickness, Luke 5:17; 8:40.
 - Provided for the people's physical needs, Mark 6:30.

⁵ Luke 11:20; Matthew 11:20-23; 13:54; Mark 9:39; Galatians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 15:19; Acts 2:22.

- Stilled the storm, Mark 4:35.
- Walked on water, Mark 6:48.
- Rose from the dead, Romans 1:4; Matthew 22:29-32; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Philippians. 3:10.
- And will come again, Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26.

In fact, when it comes to “the power of God” the Bible says that it is great (Psalms 79:11), strong (Psalms 89:13), glorious (Ex. 15:6), unsearchable (Job 5:9), incomparable (Psalms 89:8), mighty (Job 9:4), everlasting (Isaiah 26:4), sovereign (Ex. 9:16; Romans 9:21), effectual (Isaiah 43:13), and irresistible (Deuteronomy 32:39).

From this it is clear that when Paul said that the gospel is “the power of God,” he was NOT simply saying that the Gospel is effective for salvation. Rather, Paul here is asserting with as much energy as could be employed by the Greek language that the Gospel is THE means through which omnipotent God works salvation! And yet it is more than this for understand that when we consider the expression, “the power of God” we understand that Biblically the “power of God” is one and the same as Christ...

1 Corinthians 1:22-24, “For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

Do you understand what this means? If Christ and “the power of God” are one and the same, then we conclude that “outreach” is nothing more than bringing Christ to the lost. That’s what we are all about! Notice Paul’s calling when it came to the gospel:

Galatians 1:15-16, “But when He who had set me apart, *even* from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...”

We would expect to read that Paul’s calling was to preach the gospel. Instead, we read here that Paul was to preach Christ! Christ is the gospel As such, the goal of the child of God when it comes to cultural engagement is bringing the face and affections of Christ to this lost and dying world.

2 Corinthians 2:15, “For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”

Now when it is understood in these terms we see why Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. It is the all-powerful, always effective, unstoppable means by which God interacts with this world. Which brings us to ourselves and these questions...

- How about you?
- Do you understand the gospel in this light?

If we will, it will radically alter the way you and I think about “outreach.” See, the gospel is NOT simply...

- A set of propositions.
- A list of four spiritual laws.

- A program that you memorize and then go share.

RATHER, the gospel is nothing less than the person and work of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it speaks of...

- An omnipotent God...
- Coming in the flesh...
- Breaking the power that Satan held over death...
- Delivering His people from their sin and slavery...
- Declaring them not guilty of any violation of the law...
- And welcoming them into a relationship of fellowship with Himself!

Pastoral Visitation

I remember when I first entered the gospel ministry; it was incumbent upon me to visit people in the hospital. Now family of God, I hate anything and everything that smacks of phoniness. Accordingly and quite honestly, my first years in the ministry I struggled doing hospital visitation. For when someone was in the hospital, it was expected of me- ME- to...

- Go and visit them.
- Walk in the room and be “godly.”
- Speak those special and holy words which would bring calm and peace.
- Read the word.
- Pray that wonderful, pastoral prayer.

I struggled so much with it that I wondered if maybe I wasn’t called to be a pastor. But then I set my heart to study pastoral care, not in the sundry books that have been written on it, but in the Bible. I discovered that pastoral care isn’t a time when a holy man enters into an awful situation and performs. Rather, pastoral care is nothing less than bringing Christ into a room and leaving the aroma of Him when we leave.

Now understood in those terms, I can do that. In fact, I love doing that, and so do you! Remember what we’ve seen

- In the presence of God, ministry is worship.
- In the presence of the brethren, it is fellowship/refreshment.
- In the presence of the non-believer, it is cultural engagement!
- In all of the above it is the same end: Jesus Christ!

And that is why once again when the gospel is proclaimed, Paul speaks in terms of the “aroma of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). One cannot preach the gospel without bringing Christ. You cannot speak of the things of the Lord without the Lord Himself being there...

- Teaching.
- Encouraging.
- Convicting.
- Growing.

- Feeding.

That is why the Bible speaks of the Word of God as “...living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart”(Hebrews 4:12-13).

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “...profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

Romans 1:16, “...the power of God for salvation...”

Behind each God-wrought proclamation of the gospel stands Christ! Now if indeed the gospel is the “power of God” to save individuals, an interaction of Christ with the world, as opposed to...

- My intelligence.
- My wit.
- My persuasive arguments.

Then we conclude that every time we proclaim Christ, He will have His desired effect.

Isaiah 55:11, “So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

The Purpose of the Gospel

Paul wasn’t ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God and behind the gospel stands Christ Himself. Paul also wasn’t ashamed of the gospel because of the purpose of the gospel.

Roman 1:16, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.”

The basic idea behind this term, “salvation” is that of deliverance, or rescue. To be “saved” is to be delivered from a state of evil into a state of blessing. Now in the Bible, “salvation” is used in reference to three time frames...

- Salvation Past, Ephesians 1:13; 2:5; Acts 4:12; 16:30-31; Romans 1:16; 10:1, 9-10; Hebrews 2:3; 2 Corinthians 7:10. We read of the Philippian jailer:

Acts 16:30-31, “And after he brought [the disciples] out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.’”

- Salvation Present, 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; Philippians. 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:9; 2 Timothy 3:15. Paul exhorted the Philippians:

Philippians 2:12, “...work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

- Salvation Future, Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9; Hebrews 1:14; 9:28; 1 Peter 1:5; 2 Peter 3:15. Peter wrote this speaking of the Christian:

1 Peter 1:5, “Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Salvation is akin to the office of Presidency. It is...

- Something that is attained in the past...
- Worked out in the present...
- And which someday will be consummated in the future.

From this I hope you see that while in Christ all of us are saved; nevertheless in Christ all of us ALSO are being saved and ultimately will be saved! And that is the PURPOSE of the gospel.

- The bringing of God’s people to the end for which they were created.
- The restoration of man to God.
- The reversal of the fall.
- God’s tool for the consummation of all things in Christ.

This is such an important truth for us to understand. Salvation is the greatest, most important activity to which a man can give himself in this life. Salvation is far more than just deliverance from hell, BUT is in fact the process by which a person is REborn, REdeemed, and REstored to the original relationship which God intended to have with His people. At its base is the means by which a person can fulfill their ultimate purpose of glorifying God.⁶

Thus we are not shocked to discover that salvation is what God is working for in His redemptive work. Salvation is the eternal purpose of God. Paul states that we are saved...

2 Timothy 1:9, “...according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”

And what is this eternal purpose?

2 Thessalonians 2:13, “...God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”

Everything God is doing this moment in your life is for your salvation! Do you understand that? That is the barometer for “the good” referenced in Romans 8:28! Salvation is the Reason for why Christ came to this earth.⁷

Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

⁶ Compare 2 Timothy 2:10

⁷ See also Matthew 1:21; 9:13b; Mark 10:45.

Christ came to this world to affect the past, present, and future salvation which God ordained from the beginning of time. Accordingly, salvation is the end and culmination of God's redemptive work in this world. Paul summarizes what God is doing on this earth:

Ephesians 1:10, "...the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth..."

Thus, we see that the power of God of which Paul writes is not aimless, it is directed to THE specific end, aim, and culmination of all of redemptive history: Salvation! This is the second reason why Paul did not struggle with shame over the gospel. The gospel is the means through which God accomplishes His eternal work of redemption in the past, present, and future: The Salvation of Lost Souls!

Now if you think about that, it is shocking that we ever could be ashamed of the Gospel. Yet we are! Think of it in this light, you're at the park with your family and you notice a crowd gathering in an open field. You go to investigate and you discover that a man is in cardiac arrest and no one present knows CPR but you. Now the people there are doing the best they can to revive this man. They're "giving him room." They've cut his shirt off. Some are holding his hand. Others are wiping his brow. But no one is administering the life-saving CPR.

Now what would you do? Would you wonder whether or not the crowd would still like you if you saved this man's life? Consider whether or not they'd laugh at you if you spoke up? Or would you step forward and say, "This man needs CPR and I can administer it; let me at him"? I dare say that if you knew CPR you would step forward and save the man's life- with absolutely NO shame.

And yet interestingly enough, when it comes to man's salvation we alone have the words of life, and we hide them! We know the way to the great Physician, and we are afraid to share it. Our neighbors, friends, relatives, and family are dying around us, we alone possess the answer, but we refuse to speak. Why? Because to the majority of those living in our day the gospel is folly. Thus for you and me to speak it is to be thought of as a fool.⁸ Accordingly, boldness when it comes to engaging the world for Christ is going to revolve around that which you allow to compel you: the fear of man or the love of God. Yes, God has done nothing in the gospel for which you ought to be ashamed. Yet, if you care more about what man thinks than God, knowledge of God's goodness and grace will mean very little to you.

During the wilderness wandering Moses brought God's people to the southern border of the Promised Land. He sent twelve men to spy out the land. When they returned, ten said that God had led Israel to their death, the people of the land were too formidable. And the 2.5 million people who constituted Israel at the time were angry.

Yet recall what Joshua and Caleb did. They were moved by the glory of God much like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would someday.⁹ Accordingly, they spoke the gospel which enraged the nation.¹⁰

How is it that Joshua and Caleb so boldly spoke? They knew that if God is for us, no one can be against

⁸ Compare 1 Corinthians 4:10

⁹ Compare Daniel 3:17

¹⁰ Compare Numbers 14:10

us!¹¹ Hence, they knew that God alone constituted a majority!

Did you get that? So often we shrink back in our faith because “the majority” in whose presence we stand opposes God. Yet by faith you must see that God ever and always constitutes the majority. Accordingly, a large part of engaging the culture in which we live involves...

- Living by faith/reliance upon God.
- Beholding reality- the Logos- and living accordingly.
- Loving the Lord more than the approval of man.

This doesn't mean nor should we take from this the license to be obnoxious! Rather, it means that we see reality for what it is, involve ourselves in the lives of others, and then ask them to give an account of the hope that lies within them.

In the book titled “Lifestyle Evangelism” the following story is told: The author was on a cruise when he discovered that there was evangelistic conference being held on the ship. Well you can imagine what that meant; the conference-people had at their disposal hundreds of lost souls who couldn't flee from them. This author watched in amazement as each day these well-meaning Christians attempted to bring Christ to their shipmates. They held music concerts during which they would share about Christ. They held drama presentations in which they would share Christ. They conducted spiritual surveys, passed out tracts, and many, many other such things.

At one point in the cruise and during one such outreach event, the author went on a walk on deck and discovered a large group of people at the opposite end of the boat. He asked why so many were congregating there. And to his amazement they said because “the religious group is so obnoxious.” The author spent the rest of his cruise engaging the large crowds trying to flee the outreach attempts of these Christians. He didn't use gimmicks. Rather he lovingly asked questions. He engaged them! He pressed them to give an account of the hope that lay within them.

And that brothers and sisters is what cultural engagement is all about. It is NOT...

- Gimmicks.
- Trickery.
- A sales pitch.

RATHER it is, in the words of Francis Schaeffer, asking questions for fifty-five minutes and then sharing for five. May God give us the grace so to be.

¹¹ Compare Romans 8:31

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 22, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.