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Theological Convictions For No Shame Sharing, Part 2

1 Peter 4:16, "If any suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God."

In the words of Christ:

Matthew 5:10a, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness..."

Hebrews 10:32, 35, "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings... Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward."

These verses presuppose two things: First, the truth of God is such an offense that, in spite of their need for it, the world nevertheless will be angered by it and persecute those who proclaim it. People don't want to hear the gospel, even if it means the difference between life and death! Secondly, those who proclaim the truth of God will be tempted to shrink back from their testimony! That is the reason why there is so much teaching in Scripture on how to endure persecution!

Truly service in the name of Christ will find us intimidated at times, struggling to be faithful. That is

why when we come across a passage like the one before us, we take note for several reasons:

1. Paul was a sinner just like you and me, with doubts and insecurities when it came to engaging culture. Listen to his request for prayer:

Ephesians 6:20, “And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.”

Rarely do you read of a personal prayer request on the part of Paul. That he asked the Ephesians to pray for his boldness when it came to the gospel indicates that this was NOT something that came natural to him.

2. But then he turns around here and says (1) that he was “eager to preach the gospel” in a place which certainly would have meant persecution, (2) for he was “not ashamed of the gospel.” So what’s to explain Paul’s boldness? How is it that Paul was so passionate about preaching the gospel in a city he knew would persecute him?

Thankfully we are not left to speculation. For in this text, Paul gives four reasons for why he was so bold and it revolved NOT around an inherent strength, BUT a conviction over what the Gospel was/is.

Romans 1:16, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel FOR...”

With this Paul gives four reasons for his lack of shame when it came to preaching the gospel! Last time we saw the first two reasons from which we derived some important elements when it comes to cultural engagement. First we saw the nature of the gospel; it is “the power of God!” From this we saw that the gospel NOT ONLY is the one and only means whereby an Omnipotent, All-powerful Being has deigned to deliver people from their sin, BUT it also is a means whereby Christ interacts with the 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.”

Accordingly, cultural engagement is not a sales-pitch or a technique to confront a lost person. Rather, it is involves the high and holy privilege of bringing the face and affections of Christ to an individual.

We then considered the purpose of the gospel, which is salvation. Recall that salvation is at the heart and soul of God’s plan for this world. EVERYTHING that is occurring in this world has been ordained by God that He might save a people to Himself “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Ephesians 1:6). In theological terms we call this the Redemptive Principle. The grace of God is given to all that the Lord might save some.¹ That is what is going on in the world today! That is what constitutes reality!

Accordingly, we derive from this the truth that non-believers are spiritually schizophrenic. They have suffered a break with reality on account of their sin. “Outreach” therefore is engaging them such that we bring reality to bear upon their lives. If someone in your office believed that WW III had begun, you wouldn’t sit back and say, “That’s nice.” You’d ask questions and so attempt to help them.

¹ Compare Matthew 13:28-30

The same goes when it comes to any and everyone who might believe that...

- Life is about fun.
- God is an idea conceived in the heart.
- In the end, salvation is predicated upon what we do or don't do as people.

The People of the Gospel

With that we are brought to a third conviction which resulted in Paul longing to share the gospel in Rome. Notice, Paul was "not ashamed of the gospel" on account of people. First, the gospel is not exclusively for one people.

Romans 1:16, "for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to EVERYONE who believes."

From this we conclude that the gospel is NOT confined to a race, a nation, a family, gender, or a social standing. Salvation is open to all kinds of people! Now at the time of the writing of Romans, this was such an important truth for the theme of exclusivity was common in Paul's day. The Jews taught that unless you were a Jew, you could not be saved. To the Jew, salvation was based on WHO you were. And so, just as we look to Christ for salvation, the Jews looked to Abraham as their means of salvation. Christ warned the Jews of His day:

Luke 3:8, "Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

Thus, when Jews who held this belief, became Christians, the result was the rising up of a group called "Judaizers"- ones who though they professed faith in Christ, nevertheless believed that salvation was secured ONLY if you became a Jew!

The book of Galatians is a letter arguing against this heresy. Paul opens this letter with the issue clearly stated.

Galatians 1:6-7a, "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..."

What is this "different gospel"? We see it reflected in Galatians 5.

Galatians 5:2: "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you."

Circumcision was the means by which the Gentile became a proselyte! Accordingly, the Judaizers were pushing this same teaching! In essence, they were saying that for a Gentile to be saved, he first had to become a Jew! Now to counter this damnable heresy, Paul established the truth that THE GOSPEL IS FOR ALL PEOPLE-GROUPS- not just Jews!

Galatians 3:7, "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham."

In other words, circumcision doesn't make you a son of Abraham, but reliance upon Jesus Christ! If you are in Christ, then you are an heir of the promises granted to Abraham!

Galatians 3:18, 26, "For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise... For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Through the covenant of grace, Abraham became a child of God! That same status is granted to anyone and everyone through faith in Christ! Thus Paul continued:

Galatians 3:28-29, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ."

This is such an important message. And this is why this teaching went beyond the book of Galatians.

Matthew 28:19a, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [all people groups]..."

You may or may not realize it, but this would have been a controversial command because the Jews were rabidly nationalistic. Think of Jonah! Though a man of God, nevertheless he fell prey to the thinking of the time which didn't want a Gentile to be saved. He would have said that the only good Roman, Philistine, Assyrian, etc. was a dead one! As such, one rabbi of that day wrote this: "...God delights over the downfall of the godless."² And another wrote, "There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world."³

Accordingly, for Christ to call upon His people to "make disciples of all people-groups" would have raised the eye-brows of most if not all His disciples at the time. It is God's will for all peoples to be saved: Jew, Philistine, Roman, Arab, male, female, rich, poor, lepers, physically disabled, AIDS patients, movie stars, immigrants, etc.

1 Timothy 2:1-4, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men [again this would have been a strong command because Jews only prayed for fellow Jews. So Paul, for whom specifically are we to pray? Paul's answer...], for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity [clearly, when Paul said that we are to pray for all men, he was thinking in terms of the Great Commission- for all kinds of men! Now the basis for this is given in vv. 3-4...] This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men [according to the universe of discourse here, we understand this as "all kinds of men"] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The Gospel is Exclusively for One People

Family of God, do you see that it is God's will for all-kinds of people to be saved- not just middle-class, white, Americans? Now you come to grips with this and it will make you passionate about cultural engagement. It did in Paul's life as we see in our text this morning. Truly, "we've a story to tell all the

² Compare t. Sanh. 14:10; SBII, 209

³ LT2, page 256

nations!” Now having said all of this, Paul qualifies the statement; the gospel is exclusively for one people.

Romans 1:16, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone WHO BELIEVES...”

As we have seen, the powerful salvation of which Paul here writes is not the possession of any and all people: it is only for those who believe; who rely upon Christ as their sacrifice for their sin. Now what is meant by “believe”? The word literally means to “trusts in” and so carries the idea of placing one’s confidence or trust in something. Accordingly, saving faith has three components:

- Apprehension: which is knowledge of the truth and its qualities. Paul wrote: “...how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14). In order to “believe in Christ” you must first apprehend the truth. One won’t trust Christ unless he has heard of Christ. It is this “hearing,” this belief, which the demons themselves possess. ““You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder” (James 2:19). We recognize that demons are not saved. Rather, what is said here about them is that they apprehend or perceive the facts about Christ!
- Persuasion: this is where the person who apprehends the facts about Christ accepts them as being true; he is persuaded of the validity of the gospel. We see this kind of belief in, John 5 where Christ said, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:46-47). The Jews of Christ’s day accepted the writings of Moses as being true, as being the word of God! In order for these same Jews to be saved, they had to believe/accept that what Christ said also was true.

Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead...”

So you’re taught about the resurrection, BUT you don’t believe that it is true. If that is the case, you won’t trust Christ as your Savior. No! Belief requires persuasion. Yet it also involves a third element

- Reliance: actually depending upon/acting upon a received truth.

John 1:12, “But as many as received Him [that is, depend upon Christ as the sacrifice for their sin], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe [that is, rely or trust] in His name [or character].”

A chair will not hold you up unless you sit upon it. Likewise, Christ will be of no benefit to you unless you rely upon His sacrifice to take away your sin. We see all three elements of belief in reverse order:

Romans 10:14a, “How then shall they call upon Him [reliance] in whom they have not believed [in whom they have not been persuaded is truth]? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard [apprehension]?”

Truly, saving faith involves all three elements of belief! The people who receive the saving benefits of the gospel are ONLY those who...

- Hear the message.
- Accept it as true.
- And then place their trust in Christ as the basis for God's acceptance.

Old Testament Sacrificial System

We see this truth in the Old Testament Sacrificial System. No one ever would approach God without a spotless lamb. For 2000 years, God taught this important truth via the sacrificial system. When a person approached the temple, he did so with a spotless lamb- for the essence of Old Testament worship revolved around God purging the guilty of his sin.

It worked like this. Because he had violated God's commands, the sinner knew that he deserved death. Now, he could flee from the presence of God- as did

- Adam and Eve.
- Cain.
- Judas.
- Saul.

OR by grace he could receive/accept the summons to go to God, the call to worship. Yet in going to God,

- What would he do with his sin?
- How could he- being a sinful being- approach the Great I Am?

Enter the sacrificial lamb. In His grace and mercy, God allowed a substitute to die in the place of the sinner. And that substitute was a spotless lamb. Consequently, each and every worshipper approached the temple relying upon a lamb to take away God's wrath.

Now family of God, today I hope you see that nothing has changed except the sacrifice. We still...

- Fall short of God's glory.
- Violate God's commands.
- Sin.

And while the temptation is there to run and hide, nevertheless by grace God compels us to come and worship...

- NOT just on Sunday.
- BUT every day and every moment.

But on what basis can we stand before the Great I Am? John said it! It is on the basis of "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Without this Lamb, NO ONE CAN BE SAVED! And that is the point of our passage. While the gospel is not confined to a race, gender, or social standing, nevertheless it is limited to one people those...

- Relying upon Christ for their salvation!
- Who by faith are relying upon Him as their Lamb!

Come to understand this, and you with Paul will find yourself zealous to preach the gospel to those also in Rome! But here individually and corporately we diverge from this text and the example of Paul. Today we aren't zealous to engage the culture in which we live, yet it is for quite the opposite reason as in Paul's day. See, believe it or not, we really don't believe that man is that bad. The fall of mankind occurred when Satan convinced Adam that apart from God he was able to choose between right and wrong.⁴ Accordingly, from the fall onward this autonomy evolved and developed into a belief system which heralded the ability of man.

While the Jews of Paul's day fell into the pitfall of believing that only the child of Abraham could be saved from the wrath of God, we have gone to the other extreme. Today we blush over the concept of God being angry at man on account of his sin- such that at times we can be found thinking...

- Is society really that bad?
- People really aren't going to hell!
- Life without the Gospel really isn't that bad!
- My non-Christian friends, neighbors, and relatives are decent people. They don't hate God! Why should God hate them?

Now you bring a gospel which speaks of sin, suffering, hell, wrath, and repentance to a world which is "pretty good," and you indeed will feel somewhat like a religious nut! No wonder we struggle with boldness!

Yet in contrast to the prevailing attitude of our day, Paul understood that all men without the gospel...

- Are enslaved to Satan, Ephesians 2:1-3.
- Are spiritually lost, Luke 19:10.
- Upon their death can expect nothing less than the horrifying and eternal state of death where, "...the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die!" (Mark 9:48)!

Paul knew that the only solution for this terrifying expectation which all have without Christ is the gospel! And so must we! So once again, we see the need for all of man to live in reality, yet not just the lost, the believer as well...

- The stakes are high when it comes to life and death.
- To die without Christ is to suffer eternity under the wrath of Almighty God!

To understand this is to be sobered and so burdened to bring the gospel to the lost. Speaking of the Last Judgment Paul wrote this:

2 Corinthians 5:11, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men..."

⁴ Compare Genesis 3:1-7

After gazing upon the judgment that awaits this world and all its inhabitants, John wrote this:

Revelation 22:17, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

And yet is just half of the exhortation arising from this passage. Don't miss it! While the gospel is not exclusively for one people, nevertheless the gospel is exclusively for those who have faith in Christ- a faith which is granted by God Himself!

Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

There is no question in Scripture that faith is a gift granted to the sinner by God! And so we read...

Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it [salvation through faith] is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

Truly, it is only those to whom God deigns to impart faith that actually believe! In the words of Josiah Conder:⁵

'Twas sovereign mercy called me, and taught my opening mind;
The world had else enthralled me, to heav'nly glories blind.
My heart owns none before Thee, for thy rich grace I thirst;
This knowing, if I love Thee, Thou must have loved me first.

Truly, faith is a gift granted by God. In fact, we see it worked out in the lives of those whom God saved in the Bible...

Acts 13:48, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

When a Gentile believes the gospel, it is because God grants them the grace to believe. We see it in the life of Lydia...

Acts 16:14, "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart [that's regeneration] to respond [that's faith] to the things spoken by Paul."

Truly, Lydia trusted the Lord because the Lord granted her the faith to believe! This is such an important truth when it comes to engaging the world in which we live. If it is a gift, why share my faith?

Years ago Dr. Reymond, told of the time when after preaching on God's election one of the members of the church came up to him and said...

⁵ New Trinity Hymnal, Hymn 471

“If I believed that, I wouldn’t share the gospel. To think that God had already chosen those who would believe- that one’s status in heaven was based on the good pleasure of God and NOT the person’s belief. If faith is determined by God, why share the gospel?”

Dr. Reymond responded...

“If I believed that salvation was based on the choice of a person who is spiritually dead, to whom the gospel is folly, who is blinded by Satan to the message of the gospel, who is spiritually appraised, I’d never share my faith. For no matter how much I shared, no one would believe. In contrast, when I understand that faith is a gift which God is pleased to grant to many in this age, I have the conviction that through my labors, the people whom God has chosen for salvation will believe!”

And so is the conviction of each and every one of us this day! Knowing that, the gospel is the unthwartable power of an almighty God for the salvation of lost people. Only those who have been granted faith by God will believe. I go forth with great expectancy and anticipation that the word and will of God will not be thwarted! In the words of Isaiah the word of the Gospel:

Isaiah 55:11 “...shall not return to [God] empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

Or as Paul put it:

Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...”

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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 29, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.