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Romans

So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. Romans 1:15

There are very few that truly mean what Paul states here, but when we see them, we can tell almost immediately what sort of person they are. "As much as is in me" means that with every fiber of his being and every calorie he has taken in... he will expend it all for the calling to which he's been called to. This then reflects as much on the Lord as it does on Paul. Whatever the Lord gives to him, this is what he will return to the Lord. We know that Paul had a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) which hindered him in some way.

This thorn may have been failing eyesight. In Acts, Paul speaks harshly to the high priest without knowing it was him even though they were standing in the same room (Acts 23:1-5). In the book of Galatians, he noted that at one time the congregation would have gladly plucked out their own eyes and given them to him (4:15). And his letters were very distinct because of the unusually large letters he used, an indication of poor eyesight (Galatians 6:11).

Whether this "thorn in the flesh" was his failing eyesight or something else entirely, it was a limitation placed on him to keep him reliant on the grace of the Lord and not to trust in himself. Therefore, his ability to proclaim the gospel was both by Jesus' grace and in accord with his care of the opportunities and abilities that he had been given. This is the life of Paul and one to which we have been

called, if we will only respond. Time truly is fleeting and each moment can only be used in one way before it is gone.

For Paul, he was always “ready to preach the gospel.” There is no other message which can bring salvation and there is no other path to God. Paul understood the immensity of this and therefore he used everything he was and every gift he possessed to spread the message. And his intent for the days ahead was to do so for those “who are in Rome also.”

He was a man on a determined course as the Bible bears witness. He was reviled for his preaching, he was stoned for his testimony, he was mocked and jeered for proclaiming the truth, he was imprisoned several times, and eventually history tells us that he was martyred for his Lord. Is this what we are also willing to face? Each of us will stand before the throne of Christ’s glory and give an accounting for our time and gifts and so let us be ready to face Him with a life that was full of love, faith, and service to His name.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Romans 1:16

In the Greek, Paul begins with the word “not” – *ou gar epaischunomai* – “Not for I am ashamed of...” In other words, what begins with a negative is the most positive statement of his life, belief, and actions. “For” refers to what he has just said about being ready “as much as is in me” to preach the gospel. He was willing to expend himself to the very end for the sake of this good news.

“I am not ashamed” is a theme throughout his writings and tells us that what he is proclaiming certainly seems ridiculous and even ignominious to the world or there would be no reason to be ashamed. People feel shame over making mistakes. We feel ashamed when we are caught doing something we shouldn’t do. We feel ashamed when we are found naked. We feel shame when we don’t measure up in one way or another. Shame is something that is tied to that which

is regarded as disgraceful or dishonorable and Paul looked around him and saw that the world perceived his life and actions in this way. In 1 Corinthians 4:12, 13 he cites his perceptions of how he was seen –

“Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”

Despite this, he was completely unashamed of his life and conduct because they centered on “the gospel of Christ.” This is the good news. It is the message of salvation to a world of lost people who are destined for hell. Paul understood that without this message, there is only a moment of existence which ends in death and condemnation. There is no other way out of this and therefore this message is of paramount importance to the people of the world.

He then specifically explains this gospel message by telling us that “it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” The gospel of Jesus Christ contains the power to bring the dead to life, to quicken the spirit of man which died when Adam sinned. And being “the power of God” means that it is completely effectual in its ability to do so. God is the Creator and therefore there is no other power greater than He. If the gospel is the “power of God” for this purpose, then nothing can thwart it and its results will be complete in all ways. This is evidenced by Ephesians 1:13, 14 –

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Trust is placed in Jesus and the Holy Spirit then seals the believer as a “guarantee.” Therefore what God has determined cannot be thwarted again by man’s actions. It is an eternal and unchangeable decision lest God be found to have erred. This is the “power of God to salvation” that Paul writes about and of

which he was completely unashamed. His lack of shame in this follows on the noted shame of what brought it about in the first place –

“...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

The cross was considered the most shameful method of execution possible. Any dignity a person possessed was taken away there. One was stripped naked and crucified – leaving no possibility of covering oneself. As the body struggled to stay alive, even the act of breathing was brought to humiliation – the lungs filled with fluid and the beautiful voice of the person would never be heard again. Instead it would be mixed with gurgling and anguish. The horrors and shame of the cross became Christ’s resounding cry of victory and Paul was unashamed to proclaim it. The exact reason is found detailed in Philippians chapter two. Paul notes that it was God himself who took on flesh and accomplished this deed for His creatures –

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:8

In the original Greek of this verse, there is no definite article before the word “cross.” Thus Paul highlighted the absolute shame of the cross death. This is what Jesus Christ endured and this is what Paul found the most honorable of all. It is also the message that is meant for everyone who believes. There is no person outside of the reach of God’s grace and it comes through one definitive act – belief. It is faith and faith alone which saves a person. Nothing can be added to it and nothing can take away the life which is granted when that trust is exercised.

The message is for all, “for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” What Paul is saying here is an order of time, not an order of priority. The Jew first received the gospel and it was then transmitted to the rest of the world. This is a confirming thought of what he had just written “for everyone who believes.” The world is divided in many ways, but the Bible’s preeminent distinction is that it is divided as

Jew and Gentile. Despite the enormous distinction between the two, the gospel message is for and has the same effect on both Jew and Gentile.

Such is the power and glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ and yet words cannot adequately describe it.

Life application – Are you timid in sharing your faith or stepping forward and telling others about the truth that there is but one way to be reconciled to God? Ask for strength and wisdom in this matter and bear in mind that the Lord of Creation hung naked and in agony for you. What can man do to you which would be worse than what He Himself bore? Now go forth and proclaim the good news.