

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Romans 1:7-17

Call: Ps 98:1-2, 4 (NIV)

Scripture: 2 Cor 5:20-21 (NIV)

I. Introduction

Good morning, and Happy Mother's Day to all you mother's out there! We enter back into Romans this morning. This is our third week in this magnificent book, a study I'm calling "*The Gospel For All Seasons*." Today we come to what many people will say is the thesis of the letter of Romans. Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. And, I've left time at the end of my sermon for a friend of mine to share. A friend who is also not ashamed of the Gospel.

What is being Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino finally all about? Why are we here this morning? If we were to put up a sign that said, "We, PBCC, exist to _____," what would it say? We exist to do what? What is the business we are in here at PBCC? We must continue asking this question because it is so easy to get off track. It is so easy to get distracted in our busy, over-scheduled world.

You only need to go to the landing page of our website to see what we are all about: PBCC exists to "Know Jesus and Make Him Known." We are not in the business of making big churches. We are not in the business of having perfect worship services, or perfect sermons. We are in the business of knowing Jesus and making him known. Know Jesus, not know about Him but have a relationship with Him, and make Him known, be a good-newsizer. Now, I think if we were honest I think many of us cringe at that second part, making Jesus known. In our pluralistic culture, it can be scary to be a good-newsizer. Jesus is offensive to our world.

- Only one way to get to heaven?
- A God who dies on a cross?
- A person who is resurrected from the dead?

And, not only that, to make a stand for the *way of Jesus* is even more offensive.

- How dare Christians say that the hook-up culture is not God's design for us?
- How dare Christians put boundaries around marriage?
- How dare Christians be for all life, all life from womb to tomb?
- And on it goes.

It can be scary to make Jesus known. But is it fear, or are we ashamed of it? Perhaps it's both. In today's text, we find Paul sharing that he has no problem making Jesus known. In fact, he is very eager to share the Gospel with all people everywhere. He is not ashamed.

Review

Last week, we focused on the Gospel and the Gospelized. Paul was set apart to preach the Gospel of God which is centered on *“Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom 1:4). Part of that Gospel is also its embodiment in a people, a people that claim allegiance to Jesus, demonstrated by obedience to his commands. The Gospel breathes in these people. They are the Gospelized.

Today, Paul will continue his introductory comments addressing the Roman church, quickly moving into several themes he wants to address in the letter. Through it all, he will consistently draw our attention back to the Gospel of God, centered on the incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended, reigning and returning Jesus Christ our Lord.

I invite you into our text today, Romans 1, beginning in verse 7.

II. Paul Not Ashamed of the Gospelized (7-13 NIV)

7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. 9 God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. 11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. (NIV)

A. Introduction

Paul continues to use the common pattern for letter-writing in the 1st century Roman world. After he introduced himself in the first few verses, he now references the well-being of the letter’s recipients.

B. Background

When Paul wrote this letter, he had not yet been to Rome, and so he’s writing to a church that doesn’t really know him. This is probably why he spent the first few verses sharing his apostolic credentials.

It is unclear how the church in Rome originally began. One explanation is that some Romans were present at Pentecost in Jerusalem and eventually made their way back to Rome to start a church. However, *“all roads did lead to Rome”* in the first century. So, people who may have heard the Gospel in Asia, Greece or elsewhere could have easily traveled to Rome and began a church.

C. The Gospelized

Nevertheless, notice Paul is writing to *all* the Gospelized in Rome. They are all loved by God, all called to be holy and all are recipients of grace and peace. Grace was the greeting at the time of the Greeks. Peace, or shalom, was the greeting of the Jews. Paul uses both here to indeed show that this Gospel is for all people for all time. His Gospel will be the Gospel for all seasons.

D. Paul's Feelings Toward The Church in Rome

Paul then moves on to share how he feels about the church. Like a good pastor, before he speaks *to* the recipients of his letters, he speaks *about* them to God. He is not ashamed of them! Even though Paul wasn't responsible for bringing the Gospel to them, he is thankful for what God has been doing through them. Their solid faith is being proclaimed everywhere!

Despite their diversity, the early church saw themselves as a worldwide network, not isolated churches trying to make a go of it on their own. Believers traveled widely and exchanged letters regularly such that one writer called it a "Holy Internet" (Bird, 37). This is a good model for us, that we would see ourselves as one small part of the worldwide church. One of the great privileges of our prayer times on Wednesdays and Sundays is that we get to pray for the persecuted church. It reminds me each week that we are a small part of a larger church, and that this is a great privilege, to pray for our brothers and sisters everywhere, especially the persecuted.

Paul not only prays for the church, he also wants to visit, for he greatly desires to see them. Think of someone you haven't seen for awhile and you really long to see – that's how Paul is feeling. And, why does he want to visit? He wants to visit so they can mutually encourage one another. In other words, Paul is not going to visit the church in Rome simply to preach at them. Although he is the "big shot" Apostle, he will humbly visit to receive encouragement from them. It's this beautiful picture of humility and the Christian community.

E. Fruit

Lastly, Paul says he wants to visit them to "*have a harvest among you*" (Rom 1:13). The word harvest is literally "fruit." Paul wants to visit so he can gospelize the great city of Rome and gather the fruit, just as he has done in other places around the empire.

Paul then expounds on the gospelizing activity he envisions with three strong personal statements, beginning in verse 14.

III. Paul Not Ashamed of the Gospel (14-17)

14 I am obligated both to Greeks and Non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (NIV)

A. Introduction

Rome was a very diverse city, and, as I have said, the different social classes simply hated each other. It was also a densely populated city. One scholar says that in the first century, Rome was one of the most densely populated cities the world has ever known, on par with modern day Bombay or Calcutta (Thielman, 80). And, in that time period, there were huge influxes of all kinds of people, merchants, teachers, tourists and slaves. So, in verse 14, when Paul says *"Greeks and Non-Greeks, both the wise and foolish,"* I think these words cover all of Gentile humanity for Paul.

The Greeks were the educated or wise ones. The Non-Greeks were the barbarians or foolish ones. What is interesting is that for any educated Roman reading this letter, this would have sounded absurd, that Paul was *"obligated"* to "barbarians." Are you kidding me? The barbarians were essentially the slaves of the upper class. The educated Greeks *ruled* the barbarians.

However, for Paul, the Gospel is for all people. The Gospel cuts across all classes and totally levels the social landscape, because every single person stands before the living God on equal footing. We're all in the same boat. Or you could say, we're all *outside* the boat needing to be rescued.

Every single person is outside the boat, because every single person has rebelled against God, for, as he says in chapter 3, *all* people *"have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"* (Rom 3:23). Paul was converted, called and commissioned to preach this Gospel to *all* people because it applies to *all* people!

He then makes three statements about his gospelizing mission, all beginning with "I am." He says, *"I am obligated"* in verse 14, *"I am eager"* in verse 15 and *"I am not ashamed"* in verse 16.

Paul was excited to share the good news. When thinking of Paul's situation, we may think that our situation today in the West is much more difficult than Paul's. But, that is simply not true. Rome was the eternal city, built upon pride and power. And, who was Paul? Well, he wasn't an imposing figure at all. According to tradition, he was "an ugly little guy with beetle brows, bandy legs, a bald pate, a hooked nose, bad eyesight and no great rhetorical gifts" (Stott, 58). No great rhetorical gifts – like us. He must have had times when he thought, "What could he do in such a great city like Rome? It'd probably go better if I simply kept my mouth shut!" But, no, he felt obligated, he was eager and he was not ashamed. Paul wanted to gather some fruit!

Let's look at these three statements in order.

B. Obligated and Eager

We'll take "obligated" and "eager" together. Paul feels obligated to share the good news of the love of God, and is eager to do so. The obligation Paul feels is that he has been entrusted by Jesus with the love and truth of God. And, because of that, he feels obligated to share it with

everyone everywhere! He doesn't care how much education people have, whether they are successful in business, whether they are wise or foolish, he is eager to share the love of God! This is why he wants to get there! He knows Jesus and He is obligated and eager to make Him known!

All the Gospelized follow Paul in this thinking. The Gospelized have all been entrusted with the good news of the love and truth of God. We know Jesus and are called to make Him known, to be good-newsizers!

C. Not Ashamed

And, Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel. And, here we come to one of the great verses of the letter. Paul knows that the Gospel *"is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile"* so he is not ashamed of it (Rom 1:16).

Now, I think what's in Paul's mind is Jesus's words of warning in Mark 8. In that text, Jesus is explaining the way of the cross, and says, *"34 ... 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'*" (Mark 8:34-38).

I don't know about you, but those are convicting words for me. And, Jesus wouldn't have said something like that if he didn't anticipate that his disciples might feel some shame or embarrassment about him. And, sure enough, if you're familiar with this section of Mark, you'll remember how Peter responds to Jesus when Jesus says he will die on a cross. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Something shameful is going to happen to Jesus, and Peter can't handle it.

D. Why Ashamed?

Paul says, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel."* As someone has said, "There's no sense in declaring that you're not ashamed of something unless you've been tempted to feel ashamed of it" (Stott, 60). Why would Paul be tempted to feel ashamed of the Gospel?

Well, there could be a few reasons, but I think the main reason is, like Peter, because of the cross, as the writer of Hebrews says *"Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."* The cross, in the first century, was entirely shameful. There was absolutely nothing dignified about a cross.

Because we wear crosses around our necks as fashion statements, it's been lost on us how disturbing and shocking and shameful the cross really was. It was not only the most awful way to die, it was also the most shameful way to die. You were naked in public, an utterly shameful

thing. For the early Christians, can you imagine the ridicule? “A crucified Messiah? And, you call him God? You believe in a crucified God?”

As Paul traveled around on his missionary journeys, he knew exactly what people were saying about him and his Gospel. The Jews called it scandalous. The Gentiles called it foolishness (1 Cor 1:23). The educated, the great orators, the philosophers and religion professors all ridiculed it, to which Paul replies with *“27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him” (1 Cor 1:27-29).*

E. The Power of God

So, why is Paul not ashamed of the Gospel? Verse 16, *“because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”* The word for power here is *dunamis* (δύναμις), from which Nobel named his invention of dynamite. My introduction to dynamite was watching Looney Tunes growing up. I always felt bad for Wile E Coyote! Then there was that sitcom, *Good Times*, where JJ would say, “Dyn-o-mite!” Maybe you remember those days.

The Gospel is the dyn-o-mite of God. It is a “force unleashed” in the world by God to bring salvation (Gorman, 66). Of course it has to be! It simply has to be dynamite, because as Jeremiah said, *“the heart is deceitful above all things”* (Jer 17:9). Our hearts, the center of our beings, are desperately sick, hopelessly dark, even incurably wicked. Only dynamite could possibly break through. Education won’t do it. Bettering social conditions won’t do it. Going to counselors won’t do it. Those are obviously very good things, but only the Gospel can change the headstrong, hostile, hateful, hardened human heart, and bring salvation.

Paul experienced that firsthand. He is not ashamed of the Gospel of God because “it accomplishes the divine task of salvation” (Gorman, 67). The Gospel is powerful and effective. It not only informs us about Jesus and his events, it performs. It is a performative utterance. It’s similar to a pastor performing a wedding ceremony and the pastor pronounces the man and woman, husband and wife. And, it accomplishes what the pastor says. It is a performative utterance. It makes something happen. The Gospel also causes a transformation in the human heart and in a human life. And, we should say, “Of course again!” Because the Gospel is infused with the same power of creation, of the Exodus and of the resurrection. It’s infused with other things like love and grace and mercy and kindness and compassion, but also power! The Gospel informs, performs and transforms. *“It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”* Rescue comes. Rescue into the boat comes for everyone who has faith, belief in Jesus.

F. The Righteousness of God

And how does the Gospel do this? In verse 17, Paul expounds on this power. The Gospel reveals and continues to reveal the righteousness of God. The Gospel discloses and continues to disclose the righteousness of God. The Gospel pulls back the curtain and reveals God’s

character, and also God's way of righting all wrongs. The Gospel is the revelation of the totality of God's character, and His activity to put things right in our lives and in the world.

As Michael Gorman says, "We might say that God does what God is: the righteous God acts righteously; the God of justice creates justice; the faithful God practices fidelity; God the savior saves" (Gorman, 69). And, that's what the Gospel reveals and continues to reveal.

G. The Righteous Live By Faith

And, it all happens through faith for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ our Lord. In other words, you can't earn it! It is by faith alone, utter trust and dependence on Jesus. Faith is the instrument for salvation, literally from "*faith to faith*," from start to finish, from first to last, it's all about faith, allegiance to Jesus manifested in trust and obedience (Rom 1:17).

And, those who are made righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ will live! That's literally how Paul ends these amazing verses, quoting Habakkuk 2:4. Paul last word is life! If John is the Gospel of life, Romans is the letter of life. Do you want a life that passes all understanding and never ends? Then have faith in Jesus Christ, believe in Him.

Know Jesus. Have a relationship with Him through faith, and don't be ashamed to make Him known.

At this point, I'm going to call up a good friend of mine, Leong Tan. Leong demonstrates not being ashamed of the Gospel as much as anyone I know. This unashamed-ness is perhaps most demonstrated in his ministry at the maximum security prison in Soledad. As I shared briefly last week, we did a baptism there two weeks ago. I shared briefly last week, but Leong will share more now, how the dynamite of the Gospel is breaking through hearts down there.

IV. Leong's Reflection

My name is Leong Tan. Thank you Shawn for this opportunity to share about God's work in the prison.

*First I want to thank all of you who have prayed for the prison baptism. It was an amazing event; an incredible event that was possible **only through your prayers**.*

There are 10 volunteers from our church that go down regularly each week to the prison; each volunteer commits to come once a month.

There are 4 yards A through D; together they house about 3000 max security inmates - some of the most violent in all CA. We go to Delta yard, which is Level 4 max security. Level 4 is the worst you can get in terms of violence. They are not even allowed to have meals in a common area because of violence; so they are fed with food trays slipped into their cells.

Drug abuse and physical violence is rampant on D yard; inmates fight all the time and are stabbed routinely, and even correction officers as well. They do attack and kill each other; there

was an inmate killing this past Oct, and another in Dec; you can Google and read about it.

Salinas prison is a very dark place where Satan rules; it's the devil's very own backyard.

BUT THIS is also a place where **God has chosen to show His mercy and grace**; to many of the incarcerated inmates, God has appeared to them in visions and dreams and He draws them out from the gang violence **into His loving arms**.

I am here to testify to you the miraculous work that God has done through the baptism on Delta yard Last Week on Tues; 13 of us volunteers had the privilege to watch and to participate in God's redeeming work in the prison. One of the volunteers Ted put it this way – I have never seen so many answered prayers in such a short time.

I will share with you about how the idea of baptism came about. About 8 months ago, I walked into the prison chapel and I opened up the utility room – something I have done weekly literally for hundreds of times in the last 10 years. And Lo and Behold, on this day as I opened the door, there appeared before me a very large BLACK TUB. I have never seen it before, I don't know how it got there or who put it there, but it WAS there.

A large tub in the chapel – what would you do with it? Baptism? But that would be quite difficult in prison, and I was reluctant to even think about where to start. Many things that God has led me to do has often been met with a good deal of initial reluctance. But I did bring it up to our Wed morning prayer group – that is, the intercessory prayer group on Wednesday (and Sunday) morning. That's the place where a lot of things have come about through prayer. And we began praying about the possibility of baptism.

Then things began to happen.

*To baptize inmates in prison especially on a Level 4 yard, is to **enter the devil's own territory** and take away his prized belongings. In all 3 of the synoptic gospels – Matt, Mark, & Luke – Jesus says that we cannot take the strong man's goods unless the strong man is first bound! We can't take the devils' property unless his powers are first restrained. **NOTHING but the power of God through prayer can restrain the devil.***

*From the beginning, we felt a spiritual pushback from the forces of darkness. It's difficult to explain, but you kind of feel it. We live in the physical realm. But we are engaged **in a fierce spiritual battle** - whether or not we realize it. Paul says in Eph. 6 says that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the **cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly places.*

Strangely and soon after, an inmate approached me in class and asked me for the very first time - Can I get baptized here? Wow! Where did that come from? Yes, I said - we can consider baptism; let's pray about it. Then later I asked the class if anyone else wanted to be baptized. Boldly 5-6 raised their hands. Wow, amazing again – what is God doing?

I went and asked the prison admin, but they WOULD NOT allow us to use the tub for baptism. We continued to pray. After some back and forth, they finally allowed us to have baptism by sprinkling. Thank God - answered prayer!

We originally scheduled the baptism in March. But in the weeks before the baptism, there was exceptional violence on the yard, and a correction officer was stabbed by the inmates. This caused the yard to go on lockdown for a week, forcing the baptism to be postponed.

We rescheduled the baptism for 6 weeks later on 4/30. All the original visitor clearances had to be postponed as well; there was a lot of admin confusion; I was never sure which visitors were really cleared to come in on the later date. Then the week before the baptism, half the buildings went on lockdown again, forcing the bible class again to be canceled. I was getting worried.

Then on the day BEFORE the baptism, I was suddenly informed that at least one person in the group could not come in. And bad things were happening to one of the key prison admin staff³ who coordinates the Bible classes. All of us continued to earnestly pray for God's intervention that the baptism would not again be cancelled.

*I really did not know if things would work out for the baptism on the next day. It was totally frustrating and I really felt like giving up working with the prison **altogether**. I asked our group for prayer. And God continued to work in ways we could not imagine.*

On the next morning, the MORNING of the baptism, something incredible happened - God always comes through. Through a strange divine appointment, an Associate Director of Prisons up there, in Sacramento headquarters heard about the baptism and he poured in his full support for the event.

***It was like heaven came down** and all problems with the visitor clearances were solved **instantly**. It was like God saying to me - What do you need – I have it all taken care of. Just don't quit. I even had the prison warden personally sending me an email to confirm that all visitors in our group are cleared to come in. Praise God – answered prayer!*

On our long 2 hour drive to the prison on baptism day, half of the prison buildings again went on lockdown. But we decided to proceed. One of the group members Karen said – even if we can baptize just one, it would be worth it!

The baptism was going to start at about 5 pm. Completely unknown to us at that time, at 3pm - 2 hours before the baptism - some inmates were notified by the officers that everything on D yard including the baptism would be cancelled; the yard will be locked down because of violence. We had no idea this was happening.

We arrived at Delta yard and we began setting up in the prison chapel. Incredibly and

unexpectedly the Assoc. Director came down from Sacramento and paid us a SURPRISE visit with the yard captains; they pledged their support for our work. I have never met the Director before; I am just a little prison volunteer. They asked me for the list of inmates to be released for class, and they made sure all 22 of them were released from their cells to participate in the baptism regardless of the yard lockdown!

Praise God – **God IS UNSTOPPABLE!**

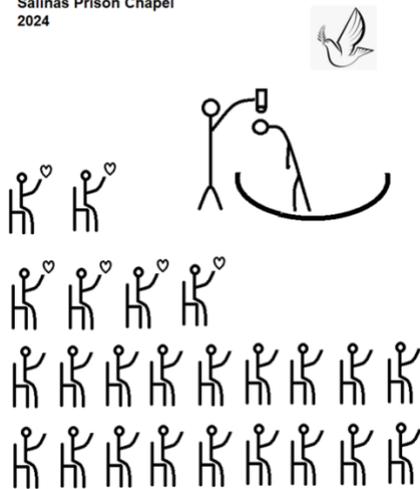
The baptism went very smoothly and **ALL 9 inmates who wanted to be baptized were baptized**. Praise the Lord! One of us volunteers - Jeff Wurtz - was baptized with the inmates. Jeff loves the inmates, and he wanted to encourage them. Thanks Jeff, everyone was so encouraged and blessed. A total of 10 were baptized.

During their testimonies, many inmates shed tears of repentance of their past violence and pledged their allegiance to Jesus. Note that these are hard core gangsters shedding tears AND4 repenting; Absolutely **NOTHING** but the power and work of God could have done this! Hallelujah!

Shawn baptized each person by pouring a generous amount of water on their heads. Each person stood in the BLACK TUB as they were baptized.

We could not take pictures so here is a sketch of the scene in the chapel.

Prison Baptism
Salinas Prison Chapel
2024



In the sketch you see Shawn pouring the bottled water over the inmate standing in the tub. Everyone was clapping, and some of these gangsters were making heart signs with their hands.

God was with us all the way. He was Glorified. We rejoiced.

So it all began with the Black TUB, and it ended with the Black TUB being used. Who put the TUB there in the first place?

I hope this is an encouragement to you as much as it has been to all of us who attended the baptism. Shawn has reminded us today of Paul's words – I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for salvation. The Gospel is the precious message that has been carefully entrusted to each one of us. Not just to some Christians, or to some specially gifted, but to every believer.

*We don't have to go to prison to share the Gospel or to do God's work. Right here where we are in the Silicon Valley, in our neighborhoods, at our places of work, people desperately need the Gospel. May God help us to reach out in love with the wonderful, precious, and powerful Gospel that has been entrusted to us. We **DO NOT** want to be **arrogant** or **obnoxious** in sharing this **precious gospel**; we want to learn to share it with love, with sensitivity, and with kindness - just the way Jesus did.*

Let us close with a word of prayer -

*“Our Gracious Father, thank you for giving us Your Son. Lord Jesus thank you for what you have done for us upon the cross. Help us Lord not just to hear, **but to experience the reality of Your powerful Gospel**. Help us to be obedient to You - **to go and share this Gospel** with the friends you have placed around us. In Jesus's Precious and Powerful Name we pray, Amen.”*

Benediction

Receive this benediction from Paul to his understudy Timothy:

As you go, *“I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you... For the Holy Spirit does not make you timid, but gives you power (dynamite), love and sound judgment.”* So do not be ashamed. Amen. (2 Tim 1:6-8)

Resources

Bird, Michael, *Romans (The Story of God Bible Commentary Book 6)*

Gorman, Michael J, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary*

Stott, John, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*

Thielman, Frank, *Romans (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*