

believes salvation is for them, but not for others. This is the person who believes for whatever reason they are worthy of the gospel and others are not. Notice Paul writes that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for the Jew and the Gentile. They are both saved by the same gospel. The spiritualist said, maybe the gospel is not for everyone. The spiritualist would say that Christ's atonement was not for everyone but for the selected ones, or the chosen ones. There are some that are just left out and locked out from the good news of the gospel.

Every time I look at someone and think to myself, God must love me more than this person. Every time I think that someone else's sin is greater than mine. Every time I write off a whole nation, people, race, those who worship other gods as people who cannot be saved, who have not been included... I am shaming the gospel.

There is another side to this as well. When we believe that not everyone is included in the work of Christ we might also think that every claim and revelation of God is equal. Paul reminds us that the gospel is for everyone from the first to the last. We are all saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul is reminding them that the law was a revelation of God, but even the law was about faith in God. In fact, Paul will show that through Abraham before the law was given, righteousness with God was by faith.

There are many claims about God and who God is. There are major world religions with their own revelations about God, and there are many individual expressions of people and their view of God. They are not all equal. That is the claim of Christianity. Our claim is not that Jesus is a way to God... but the way to God. That is Jesus' claim. Our claim is not that Jesus is another revelation... but Jesus is the revelation of God. So, when we say it does not matter what you believe, just believe something. We have lost the power of the gospel. When we accept that we are simply saying the cross was not necessary and Jesus is not necessary and the power of the gospel is lost. In essence, we have also excluded that person from the power of the gospel. That is to shame the gospel.

Here we are living in the center of the universe. We live in a very educated, sophisticated and powerful nation. In our culture there is every philosophy of life and into that mix we confess that God so loved the world that God sent Jesus to die for our sins and was raised through

the power of God. If we place our faith in Jesus as Lord, we can have life that is abundant and eternal. That is the gospel. I am not ashamed.



I Am Not Ashamed

Romans 1:16-17

TRINITY PULPIT

Paul writes "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes; for the Jew and the Gentile, for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith."

I am not ashamed of the gospel! Why would Paul write such words? Paul is writing a letter to the church in Rome at a time when he had experienced great hardship. He had been imprisoned and so the gospel had caused him shame, that is shame in the eyes of others. Also, Paul wrote this letter to a cosmopolitan people. This was Rome. This was the center of the universe. It was the place of power, thinking and sophistication. This is the church in Rome. They had heard it all and they thought they knew it all. All of the great philosophers in life were alive and well in Rome. Into the mix Paul places the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine how outlandish Paul's claim must have sounded in sophisticated and powerful Rome? He was claiming that life could be found by placing your faith in a poor, country preacher who had been crucified on a cross the place of shame by Rome. This very crucifixion was the method the God of the universe had used to provide forgiveness of sin for all people. God had not only allowed this to occur, He also planned for it to occur to draw all people to salvation. Now this same man who had been crucified had also been raised from the dead. If you would just simply have faith that this was God's plan, you can have life and you can be in a right relationship with the God of the universe.

This is the good news of the gospel. There are no 12 steps; there is no intellectual ascent. There is no code, no secret law. In the midst of all of the great philosophies of life, Paul asserts that the truth of our living, existence

and eternity is found in the story of a carpenter turned preacher, crucified man from Galilee. No wonder Paul would say of this gospel it is a stumbling block for the Jew and it is nonsense to the Greek.

It was a stumbling block to the Jew because God could not become human like you and me and it was nonsense to the Greek because of the concept of resurrection. Yet, Paul would write, "I am not ashamed."

What about to those whom Paul wrote? Were they ashamed of the gospel? Paul was writing to Christians who had accepted this good news. Paul was writing to Christians who were living in this sophisticated and powerful culture and they were a distinct minority. If you were to ask them they probably would have said no, we are not ashamed of the gospel, however the truth in their actions proved otherwise.

In the church in Rome there were three distinct groups that Paul addresses in these few verses concerning shame and the gospel. It might now be that these were embarrassed by the gospel, but Paul's point is something much deeper. Paul suggests that through their actions and attitudes they were treating the gospel with shame. They were not recognizing the power of the gospel. The sad truth is these same attitudes continue to hinder the work of the church and the message of the gospel in our powerful, sophisticated and educated culture. Lets look at these attitudes for a moment.

The first was the attitude of the legalist. There was Jewish legalist in the church in Rome. Much of Romans instruction to those who would claim that keeping the Jewish Legal Codes would put you in right standing with God. Paul's argument throughout this letter is to show that everyone is in need of God's forgiveness and that this forgiveness comes through Jesus and by faith and not by the law. This righteousness is not something we earn, but that we receive.



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Yet, the legalist was one who believed that to please God and be accepted by God there was a great checklist that needed to be completed. God was the great judge and God gives you a list of rules, codes and you have to complete the list. The idea, of course, is that to be in good standing with God what is needed is for you to be a good moral citizen.

Paul is saying that when we reduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to a list of laws and codes to be kept, we have become ashamed of the gospel. We essentially are saying that the cross is not enough there must be something more. Paul writes it in our text for the day in this way:

In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed a righteousness that is by faith from the first to the last.

In other words, faith is not a legalistic act. It would be faith that would put you in right standing with God. It is faith in what God has done through Jesus and not faith in what we can do for God that puts us in right standing with God. There were those in the church in Rome, as they were in other places where Paul traveled, who were trying to add to the gospel of Jesus and the righteousness that had come from God.

The legalist, in Paul's day, would have been trying to add to the gospel the keeping of certain Jewish laws. There was the constant battle over circumcision of men. Circumcision was an outward sign of belonging to the covenant God had made with God's people. Thus, early in the life of the church there was a demand by some that circumcision be practiced by Gentiles that were coming to Christ. Paul addresses this thoroughly in his letter to the Galatians who had received the gospel and now were adding to it circumcision and other customs. Paul would ask, "Who has bewitched you? Who has thrown you into such confusion?" Paul would write, "I am astonished how quickly you have deserted the gospel and turned to another gospel that is no gospel at all. There are those who are confusing you and perverting the good news you have heard."

So, it is with the legalist. The legalist just cannot accept the simplicity of the gospel. They say yes, faith in Jesus is essential but you also need... then add your own expectations. Today legalism in the church is not only deterring the good news of the gospel, it is also becomes a great burden to the believer. I am here this morning to give you good news and to set you free.

First of all, we must not shame the gospel by placing upon others our expectations. The gospel is very simple. God loves us and sent Jesus to die for our sins and then,

raised Jesus from the dead so that by placing our faith in Jesus and choosing to follow Jesus and to be obedient to Him, we have life abundant and eternal. When we begin to place other expectations on others in regards to their Christianity we begin to shame the gospel.

I have heard some incredible things as a pastor over these 25 years regarding the criteria of what it means to be Christian. They range from what we eat, drink and put in our bodies, to our latest opinion on the latest hot political topic. I have been told by people of both political parties that you cannot be a Christian and be a part of the other political party. I have been told that you must believe in a certain way or the world is going to end and the way the world began and when it began if you are going to be a Christian. The list goes on and on and it is exhaustive and it is exhausting. In our legalistic lists what we lose is what is essential and that is there is no one who is good enough or smart enough to be accepted by God on their own. What we lose is grace and God's grace and our faith is what is essential to our salvation.

When we impose expectations on others that are more than grace and faith, we have essentially said that the gospel is not enough and thus we are ashamed of the gospel.

What may be more incredible is how this type of thinking robs us of the good news of the gospel. It is not merely others that we place these expectations upon but ourselves. We have our own expectations that must be met and if they are not, then we truly live with shame. That kind of shame is not simply embarrassment, it is the kind of shame that keeps us weighted down with guilt and never realizing the freedom that comes when we are loved, accepted and forgiven by God.

Jonathan Merritt's new book, *Jesus is Better Than You Imagined*, contains one chapter that has become a firestorm in Christian circles. Jonathan grew up as a child of the church. His father is a leading and influential conservative Southern Baptist pastor who was President of the Southern Baptist Convention. Jonathan grew up like so many of us who grew up in a Southern Baptist Church. His life revolved around the church and he did not resent it, but rather embraced it. He attended Liberty University and then Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest. He is now a gifted writer, reporter and speaker. However, in his book he tells his deepest secret which involved his physical and sexual abuse at the hands of a older neighbor boy who was also a child of their family's friends. This event has caused Jonathan incredible pain, shame, guilt and even confusion as an adult male. As he shares this and some consequences from this event he writes in his book:

In order to release my secrets I must uncurl my white knuckled fingers from deep desires:

My desire to be perfect

My desire to be liked

My desire to be in control

My desire to be successful

Then he closes his chapter with this word:

When I am feeling pretty bad about myself, when the wounds of my heart cry out loud for healing, when shame attempts to suffocate me, or when I am especially discouraged over my most tragic failures, I find myself holding onto a thread. A thread called grace.

Legalism will rob us and others of grace. The gospel is good news. What Jesus did is enough for everyone one of us. When we add to it our expectations we put it to shame.

There is another side to this as well. There was another group in the church in Rome. They were the Libertines. The opposite of the legalist is the libertine. The Libertine is the one who accepts God's grace and then puts it to shame by living as they please and not in obedience to Jesus. Remember... I said do not put on the gospel our expectations but when we follow Jesus, Jesus does have expectations and it is simply this; we must allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives." The libertine says to himself, I believe in Jesus but I will do things my way. The libertine says to herself, I believe in Jesus but I will treat others as I want.

The book of Jude is a letter warning against the influence of libertines in the church. Listen to what Jude writes:

They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. Later Jude describes them as "clouds without rain, blown by the wind, autumn trees without fruit twice dead, wild waves of the sea foaming their shame, wandering stars for whom the blackest darkness has been reserved forever. They pollute their bodies and they reject authority.

In other words, the libertine attitude says I am saved by grace, now I will live as I please and not what pleases God.

The libertine wants what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called

"Cheap Grace." Bonhoeffer writes, "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

Paul writes that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. The word power is the word for dynamite. The gospel is dynamite. It changes everything. It blows up our presuppositions about God, our world and ourselves.

The gospel must change us. Here is the problem with the libertine view of Christianity. One, it robs the world of a true authentic witness. If people hear our claims of faith and yet see nothing different in our lives, then why should there be any desire for them to come to Christ. If our lives are just like everyone else who does not follow Christ, then what witness is there to the importance of following Christ? If our priorities are the same, if our language is the same, if the way we react to others is the same, if the way we spend our time is the same,

if our values are the same as everyone else in culture, then what value is there in following Jesus? The witness of the church is lost.

Second, if we believe that the gospel is about saying we believe the right things without any transformation of our lives, then the gospel is a cruel and impotent joke. What do I mean by that statement? How cruel it would be of God to simply make the gospel about something we say about God and Jesus, that is our confession of faith, and then leave us to our sinful ways that destroy us in this life. How terrible it would be if God simply said "okay, you have said you believe in Jesus... that is good now, go and live your life as you please and good luck." That would be the greatest of all tragedies.

Paul would write if only in this world we have hope in Christ we are to be pitted above all people. Let me add however, if our only hope in Christ is of the next world and Christ has not influenced our lives in this world, we are also to be pitied. The gospel has a power to change us. The gospel saves us not only for eternity, but also from our sinful selves right here and right now. When we fail to allow the work of the Holy Spirit transform us, then we put the gospel to shame.

There is one more group or attitude and that would be the spiritualist. That is the person in the church that

WHEN WE IMPOSE EXPECTATIONS ON OTHERS THAT ARE MORE THAN GRACE AND FAITH, WE HAVE ESSENTIALLY SAID THAT THE GOSPEL IS NOT ENOUGH AND THUS WE ARE ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL.