

## Power of the Gospel

Hey man, haven't you heard of freedom from religion?"

He asked the funnel cake vendor. Jadyn had taken a break to get a snack. He and some friends had a booth at the July 4th weekend outdoor festival and were selling T-shirts and hats that carried the name of their church—DiverseCity. They were also selling Bibles and Christian books and videos.

Jadyn had shared the Gospel with Jewish, Muslim, and other vendors at the fair. At one time he was ashamed to tell anyone about Jesus, but now he shared his faith with anyone. Sales had been slow for their booth, and Jadyn left the table to his fellow church members to mix and mingle on the beautiful day. He could think of no better time to share his good news with whomever would listen.

Jadyn smiled at the funnel cake vendor as he sprinkled the powdered sugar on top of the fried cake. "Christ has given us the freedom to choose Him or not. I wish you would give Christ a try."

"Go on, man," said the funnel cake vendor. "You're holding up my line."

As Jadyn walked away, pulling at the soft doughy bread, he heard a voice call out, "Dude, wait!"

Jadyn turned to see a teenage boy hurrying after him. "Do you have a booth?" he asked. "I like the shirt you're wearing. Can I talk to you?"

"Sure, man," Jadyn said, breaking out in a wider smile. "My booth is just down here."

**1.** *How can shame ruin our lives?*

**2.** *How does releasing past shame free us to share our witness?*

**3.** *Who has impressed you with his or her unashamed witness?*

## Paul's Gratitude

*Romans 1:8-10, KJV*

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

*Romans 1:8-10, NIV*

<sup>8</sup>First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. <sup>9</sup>God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you <sup>10</sup>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.

Paul began the Book of Romans as he did many of his other letters, with a humble acknowledgment of his appointment by God as an apostle, and a summary of his mission.

Paul's first thought about these believers was gratitude to God for their responsive faith, especially in the epicenter of one of the world's most significant superpowers ever. Rome's domain stretched across Europe, North Africa, and into Asia. God, in His sovereignty, chose this kingdom, at this time in their history, to serve as a conduit for the Gospel. Word of new ideas and stimulating philosophies traveled rapidly along Roman trade routes.

Calling upon God as his witness, Paul testified to the fact that these young believers in Rome were constantly in the center of his prayers—and of course, of his consciousness as he served the church in other parts of the known world. He used words like “constantly” and “at all times” (vss. 9-10) to highlight how much he thought about these people. He wanted them to know that their persistence in the faith did not go unnoticed by him—or, humanly speaking, by the God of the universe to whom he directed his frequent prayers.

The God to whom Paul prayed is the heavenly Father he also served by preaching the gospel of redemption and reconciliation. This was a dangerous task for Paul, whose teachings were seen as a challenge to the power and authority of the Roman Empire. Of course, Paul had no political ambitions whatsoever, so the Caesars' political concerns were unfounded. Paul had been anxious to make it to Rome, but had been thwarted up to that point. It wasn't until Paul appealed to Caesar that the apostle was able to secure free passage to the city to which he longed to visit.

**4.** *Why was Paul grateful for the believers in Rome?*

**5.** *What had long been a traveling goal of Paul?*

## Paul's Longing

*Romans 1:11-13, KJV*

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

*Romans 1:11-13, NIV*

<sup>11</sup>I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—<sup>12</sup>that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. <sup>13</sup>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.

Paul continued in his praise of the Roman believers by pulling the curtain back on his motives. He longed deeply to see these new followers of Christ so that they could benefit from each other's spiritual gifts.

It can easily be argued that the Lord blessed Paul with many spiritual gifts including teaching and encouragement

(Rom. 12:7-8). In his humility, the apostle also acknowledged that he would benefit from the reciprocation of encouragement and faith-building. Along with spiritual gifts, God gives us all (even the apostles!) spiritual gaps that can only be filled by the gifts of other believers. In this way, the Holy Spirit keeps us utterly dependent upon one another for our spiritual health.

Paul assured the Romans that, many times, he intended to come see them but had been thwarted in doing so—perhaps because of crises that needed to be addressed within the church or because of persecution from without. In any case, those obstacles looked as if they were going to be removed, and Paul was ready to make his way to see these eager followers of Jesus. In preparation for this visit, he penned this letter to the Romans in order to give them something to meditate upon before he arrived.

Paul reaffirmed that his mission was to the Gentiles. Paul was hoping to see the same type of spiritual fruit among the non-Jews he had seen throughout his missionary travels.

**6.** *What did Paul hope for in his relationship with the Roman believers, whom he would be meeting for the first time?*

**7.** *What was Paul's motivation to get to Rome?*

## Never Ashamed of the Gospel

*Romans 1:14-17, KJV*

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to

*Romans 1:14-17, NIV*

<sup>14</sup>I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

<sup>15</sup>That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who

every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. <sup>17</sup>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.”

Paul was driven by a sense of obligation to get the Gospel to the Gentiles. In addition to Greeks and non-Greeks, Paul was ready to preach to the wise and the foolish. He was not addressing intellectual capacity here. Rather, he intended to convey the Good News to people of all walks of life. God does not show favoritism.

Paul’s famous admonition, “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” has inspired countless believers to share the Good News of Jesus in contexts that are hostile to anyone who identifies with Christ. Paul was never embarrassed to convey the hope of the Gospel—even to those who mocked him. The power of the Gospel—namely, the ability to redeem and restore the most reprobate heart—is unmatched by any philosophical system or therapeutic system. Paul reiterated that the Jews had “first dibs” on acknowledging Jesus as their Messiah. Once the good news had been preached to them, however, the Holy Spirit turned Paul’s attention to all the known world.

The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the one who experiences saving faith. In fact, it is only through faith that one can be reconciled with God. It is by this faith that the righteous live and bear fruit for the Kingdom. Any good works are a result of, and evidence of, saving faith—they are not the things that gain us God’s favor. Faith alone is what drives the heart of the follower of Christ.

**8.** *To whom did Paul feel obligated when it came to preaching the Gospel?*

**9.** *What is the relationship between righteousness and faith?*

## A Living Epistle

We come into visual proximity of countless strangers every single day—people we may never notice but who take notice of us. Within seconds, people subconsciously analyze one another. Many of our assumptions are incorrect; other perceptions are accurate. Without words, we speak.

When we speak words, we reveal our hearts. So what are we saying when we speak—are we being salt to the world around us? Is the light of God’s love on display in the way a lamp illuminates from the table, or is a city on a hill visible from afar? Is our speech tempered and modest, or is it abrasive, crude, or offensive?

We are commanded to be “living epistles,” living letters that are a constant witness and an example of righteousness that is seen and read by anyone. As Paul told the Corinthians, “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone” (2 Cor. 3:2). Our character displays our faith; our words reveal our wisdom and our works display our conviction and integrity. As we walk in unity in the faith and obedience to Christ, people are drawn to Him, and the opportunity to witness is presented.

Prior to his salvation, Paul thought his persecution of Christians was a righteous cause. When the Lord saved him, Paul abandoned everything he used to be in order to embrace who God ordained him to be. “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

**10.** *How can we be “living letters” for Christ in our everyday lives?*

**11.** *What do you need to leave behind in your life to unashamedly share your faith?*

**12.** *Can you be only a “silent witness” for Christ? Explain your answer.*

## 'I Am Not Ashamed'

When we decided to follow Christ, a resurrected being recreated after the image of Christ emerged triumphant and is now an ambassador of Christ. We represent Him wherever we go! We must represent Him always with honor, dignity, modesty, holiness, obedience, wisdom, righteousness, and boldness.

► *This week, forget the shame of your past and embrace the position and authority of an heir of God and joint heir with Christ. You may want to write some past "shame" here and cross it out, or write it on a separate sheet of paper and throw it away, symbolizing your new life in Christ. Pray to the Holy Spirit to open opportunities to share the Gospel this week in both word and deed.*

### KEY VERSE

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. —Romans 1:16, KJV

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. —Romans 1:16, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of July 12 through July 18

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Genesis 15:1-8—God's Covenant with Abraham.
- Tues.** Genesis 12:1-9—All World's Families Blessed through Abraham.
- Wed.** Romans 4:13-15—Promise Realized by Faith Not Law.
- Thurs.** Romans 4:16-18—For All Who Share Abraham's Faith.
- Fri.** Romans 4:19-21—Abraham Believed Despite Impossible Odds.
- Sat.** Romans 4:22-25—In Christ, Believers Share Abraham's Faith.
- Sun.** Romans 4:1-12—Abraham, Father of the Faithful.