

Strength to Speak Up

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Romans 1:16

To the unbelieving world, Christianity doesn't make any sense. The same chorus seems to repeat again and again: it's a crutch to keep the weak from embracing reality; it's a grand scheme to hold back humanity from enlightenment and progress; it's too mysterious; it's far too simple.

The apostle Paul faced many of the same obstacles when he preached God's Word in the ancient Roman Empire. The prevalent Greco-Roman culture highly valued human wisdom, and they were skeptical of traveling sages peddling the truth for a price. Though Paul wasn't out to collect coins, Greek philosophers scoffed when Paul spoke of a resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:32), and one Roman governor told Paul, "Your great learning is driving you insane" (Acts 26:24). Even many of the Jews, the people who first received God's written law, had hardened their hearts to a suffering and dying Savior. Truly, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18a).

While these barriers to faith stubbornly stood against his message, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, encouraged the Christians in Rome with these words: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

In an age of nearly constant persecution, Christians needed those heartening words, especially since they often faced death for professing their faith. The temptation to deny Jesus was strong for them, and still is for us today. Christians going undercover is still not an option; as Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him" (Luke 9:26).

Too often, however, Christians have set aside their beliefs in a time of trouble, and treated Jesus as though he were an embarrassment. Time and time again, we've hidden away the gift of faith in the sand; we've conformed to the pattern of this world; we've chosen pleasure, reputation, wealth, peace, and security over God and his Word. Those attitudes are sinful, and they infect everyone. God has every right to be ashamed of us.

But God cares for us, far more than we can know, and loves us in spite of ourselves. Since we could not love God perfectly, Jesus came to earth to love God in our place. Since we placed our peace and security over our faith, Jesus proclaimed God's Word and was publicly rejected by his friends and enemies. Since we were ashamed of God, and since we could not save ourselves, Jesus died a shameful death for us.

That is the heart of the gospel, "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Through the gospel, we learn of Jesus' perfect life, his sacrificial death, and his glorious resurrection. This gospel gives faith and life where there was doubt and death, and turns hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. Faith clings to God's Word and finds its joy there, and helps us to do God's will out of thankfulness to him.

It is true that the world will always oppose the gospel and its work. But, with God-given strength, we are able to speak up for Christ without hesitation, to not be ashamed of the hope that we have, and to let our lights shine through all the difficulty and trouble that this world can throw at us. Since our shame was placed on Christ, may we always sing with the hymn writer:

“Ashamed of Jesus? Just as soon
Let midnight be ashamed of noon.
'Tis midnight with my soul till he
Bright Morning Star, bids darkness flee.”

(Christian Worship 347:2)

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank you for your love and for redeeming us from our sins. Too often we have been ashamed of you and your Word. Send your Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and help us to witness boldly to your great name. Help us to speak the truth in love, and move the hearts of those who do not yet know you. In your great name alone we pray. Amen.

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