

The Gospel, the Power of God
Romans 1:8-32
Key Verse: 1:16

by Dr. John Jun

"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."

Apostle Paul had never been to Rome. But he never stopped praying for Rome evangelization. Due to his prayer, his shepherd heart grew and was burning with obligation to preach to Romans and all the Gentiles. Today's passage can be divided in two parts; First, I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks (8-17). Second, what are the evils of the Gentile world which prevent the truth (18-32).

Through today's passage, let's restore our shepherd heart for post-modern intellectuals just as Paul had for young Romans who fell into sin.

Let's also have the superiority of the gospel and preach it boldly like Paul.

1. I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks (8-17)

In verses 8-10, we can see Apostle Paul's thanksgiving and prayer topics for the Christians in Rome. Firstly, he thanked God for Jewish Christians who pioneered Rome, the capital city of the only superpower nation. He thanked God, believing that the Roman church secured the bridgehead for world mission and could spread the gospel throughout the world. Since their faith was being reported all over the world, Paul was very thankful, even though he never met most of them.

What then was Paul's prayer for them? Look at verses 9-10. "God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 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 earnestly prayed to go to Rome as a missionary. God was his witness how much he prayed at all times for Christians in Rome. He was truly a man of prayer for Rome pioneering.

Verses 11-15 tell us that Paul was obligated to both Romans who lived in the developed Greek culture and to those who lived in underdeveloped culture under the non-Greek influence. Paul's mission vision for Rome came from his third mission journey in Ephesus, where he had daily discussions with disciples in the Tyrannus lecture hall for two years. Then all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the Asian province heard the word of the Lord, and God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Through this, Paul saw the vision and said, "I must visit Rome also." (Ac 19:21) What was the purpose for Paul to visit Rome?

Look at verse 11-12. He wanted to impart to them some spiritual gift to make them strong. And he wanted to bear fruit just as he did among other Gentiles. (14)

Why did Paul say that he was obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish?

First, it was because he knew that his great debt was canceled. (Mt 18:24-35) In Matthew 18:24-35, Jesus said in a parable, "A man owed ten thousand talents to a king. How much is it ten thousand talents? It is 19.2 billion dollars. There was no way for him to pay back the king even if he sold all his property and family members. So he fell on his knees before the king and said, "Be patient with me and I will pay back everything." But it was impossible. Then his master took pity on him and canceled all the debt without any obligation."

At that time, the man was a full of obligation of grace to the king and he was ready to offer his life for the king and for king's mission to perform.

Apostle Paul was the sinner of sinners who persecuted early Christians.

Our Lord Jesus canceled all his sins without any demand. And he received apostleship for the gentiles. Jesus crucified and rose from death and gave the Great Commission to all disciples. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 19a)" Because of this grace, Paul was full of obligation to our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Paul was full of obligation to preach the gospel to all the Gentiles.

Second, because he had received freely, he gave freely. (Mt 10:7-8; 18:24-27) Jesus called his 12 disciples and sent them out on a mission journey training. Before sending them out, Jesus said to them, "Freely you have received the gospel, freely give it." (Mt 10:8) The gospel has an absolute value because it gives salvation for one's life. It is more valuable than ten thousand talents. We cannot buy salvation with money. But Jesus canceled the debt of all our sins without any demand. (Mt 18:24-27) Not only did he cancel all our debt of sin, but he also gave eternal life and his kingdom as our inheritance.

Therefore, we have a great debt to God for his grace. Our God never asks us to pay back our debt. He only wants us to take care of campus students and be responsible to preach the gospel to post-modern intellectuals. One hymn writer wrote, "Lord Jesus, we owe you beyond our descriptions. How can we repay you?" The grace of Jesus on the cross, who shed his precious blood for us, is far greater than one can ever tell. Even if we sell all our property and lives, we cannot repay. As a great debtor to Christ, Paul was so eager to preach the gospel to people in Rome. (15) However, it was not easy for the Jewish Christians to preach the gospel to Roman citizens. It was a shameful thing to do.

But what did Paul say to them? Look at verse 16. "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." Why then were the Jewish Christians in the first century ashamed of the gospel?

First, because politically, Israel was a Roman colony. At that time, the Roman Empire conquered the entire world as the only superpower nation. Rome was the biggest city and it was magnificent. The Roman emperor's power reached its climax. On the other hand, Israel was a small colonial country. Therefore, they felt deeply inferior to the Romans, and could not dare to preach the gospel.

Second, Rome was the highest developed country, wealthy economically and rich culturally. The Roman Empire conquered the entire world and brought all kinds of highly-prized treasures and slaves to Rome. They say that there were four times more slaves than Roman citizens in Rome. Wealthy Roman citizens built luxurious houses and enjoyed parties and gladiator fights daily in the Colosseum. But poor Jewish Christian immigrants lived in ghettos and had house church ministry. It seemed that rich Roman citizens did not need the gospel.

Third, they were ashamed of the gospel of Christianity. Jesus was born in a small town as a poor carpenter's son. He did not receive a higher education. Finally, he was sentenced to die on the cross with two other criminals, the most shameful way to die. Humanly speaking, it was shameful to preach this Jesus to Roman citizens. So Roman citizens said, "Christians are weird and have childish superstitions." To them, the gospel story was foolish. (1Co 1:23) Christians in Rome were a minority and lived at the bottom of society. It was shameful for them to preach this gospel to Roman citizens who were rich and powerful.

But what did Paul say to them? Look at verse 16 again. "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." Why was Apostle Paul not ashamed of the gospel?

First, the gospel was absolutely needed for Jews and Romans when Paul saw them spiritually. Even though Roman citizens lived a high class cultural life, to Paul they also needed the gospel. They were proud of living luxuriously, eating fancy foods and enjoying gladiator fights among slaves and wild animals.

But their inner life was like that of Emperor Nero who felt no satisfaction, only meaninglessness, and no fruit. To see them with spiritual eyes, they were idol-worshippers, immoral people who fell short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23) and their wages of sin was death (Ro 6:23a). They worshiped idols, materialism, political power, and pleasure-seeking. Because of these, they fell into deep sins. They were very corrupted morally and homosexuality spread

wildly in their society, like Sodom and Gomorrah. To Apostle Paul's eyes, one million Roman citizens walked on the street not as human beings, but as zombies.

Second, the gospel is the power of God which gives salvation for everyone who believes. Look verse 16b. "...because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." The fundamental problems of mankind are sin and death. No one but God can forgive our sins. God so loved the world, and he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes shall not perish, but have eternal life. Only this gospel is God's power that can save men from their sins and death, and give eternal life. When anyone receives this gospel, he can be free from the chains of sin. He can be free from the power of evils and break out from the chains of laws.

Paul experienced the power of the gospel in his life. Before receiving the gospel, he breathed out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Ac. 9:1) He went to Damascus to arrest Christians. On the way there, he met the Risen Jesus. (Ac 9:15) He accepted Jesus personally, received salvation and experienced the power of God. (16) He became an apostle to the Gentiles and proclaimed the gospel to Illyricum from Antioch. (Ro 15:19)

Later he was in prison, but he was a good shepherd who fed European Christians with spiritual food. So he could say in verse 17, "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.'" God's righteousness can be revealed in the gospel only by faith.

2. What are the evils of the Gentile world which prevent the truth? (18-32)

1. The sin of idol worship (19-25)

What kinds of sin prevent the truth of God? First, the sin of godlessness (idol worship), second, the sin of wickedness (immorality). Look at verse 18. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

The sin of the Gentile world is that they, the creatures neither glorified the creator God nor gave thanks to him. As a result, they began to make idols and worship them. Apostle Paul saw how people worshiped idols through his third mission journey. In verses 18-23, Paul explained the empty hearts of those who worshiped idols and God's righteous decree on them. (24,25)

Why did they abandon God intentionally?

For, God gave them rational conscience and reason to know him.(19)

And because, God gave them his eternal power and divine nature to know him.(20)

What was the source of sin in the Gentile world?

Look at verse 21. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." They knew God, but they fell into their own pride. They neither glorified God nor gave thanks to him. In other words, if they claimed to know God, they were bound by God and had to live by his words. It caused inconvenience and restriction for them. So they did not worship the Creator God. They thought that they were wise, but they became fools. They exchanged God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

These days people abandon the Creator God. They neither glorify God nor give thanks to him. They become proud with futile thinking and worship idols. 21st century science and information technology brought so much darkness and led people to materialism, relativism and hedonism. How did God make them pay for their sins? God gave them

over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped created things rather than the Creator. (24,25) It was indescribable sexual immorality in the first century. When we do not worship the Creator God, we too fall into the same sins.

2. The sin of moral corruption (26-32)

When they did not establish a right relationship with God, they became idol worshipers and morally corrupted.

Look at verses 26-27. "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." Paul says homosexuality is unnatural, indecent and abnormal. These days in America and Europe, homosexuality has spread like swine flu. What is worse, some Christian leaders are homosexuals. Five states of America made homosexual marriage legal. But this immorality destroys families. According to one of high school teacher in Chicago about the 90 percentage of the students are broken families. The family is the core of our society. If the family is destroyed, the society will be destroyed. If the society is destroyed, our societies of the earth would be like orphanages without families.

Verses 28-32 describe moral corruption in a society and how people invented evils and practiced them. People did not think it was important to have a true knowledge of God. So God left them and allowed them to have their own worthless thinking. So they do what they should not do. They are filled with every kind of sin, evil, greed and hatred. They are full of jealousy, murder, strife, fighting and lying. They hate God. They are rude, proud, and brag about themselves. They do not obey their parents. They are foolish, they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or mercy to others.

When we do not establish a right relationship with God, societies become rotten to the core. Their sins grow until they not only continue to do these evil things but also approve of those who practice them, even though they know God's righteous decree of death. (32; Ro 6:23)

When people do such evil things, they insist on their rights instead of repenting. Many people regard an immoral life as normal, and a normal life as abnormal. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 say, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." Our society is getting worse morally like the first century of Rome,

What should we do? When we see our time, we can see signs of the end of the age. Are we going to be depressed, give up and become hedonists? When the second coming of Jesus is near, Jesus prophesied false prophets would come. There will be wars and rumors of wars. There will be earthquakes in various places. (Mk 13:5-13) Then people do evil things and their love turn cold. (Mt 24:12) People deliberately reject God and worship idols. They are morally very corrupted. But what did Jesus give us a direction in this situation? When we look at Mark 13:10, it says, "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." Even if earthquakes comes and shakes your 1:1 tables, you should be afraid. You should hold your Bible study tables and preach the gospel.

Conclusion: Here we can see Apostle Paul's great shepherd heart for the Romans. This is a post-modern generation. Our post-modern generation is just like the first century young Romans who were idol worshipers and corrupted severely.

God used an Apostle Paul to overcome Roman's situation. And Roman Empire became Christian country. We too, like Apostle Paul must have a great shepherd heart for our postmodern intellectuals and let us to preach the gospel of the salvation to the campus intellectuals.