

Romans 1:8-18

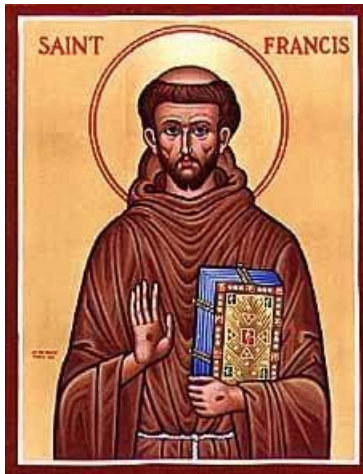
8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

In his introductory remarks to the church in Rome, we see that Paul is itching to preach the gospel to them. *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.* This eagerness goes hand in hand with the power of the gospel in the next verse. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

Why would Paul have added this point about not being ashamed? Were there many in his day who were ashamed of the gospel? Are there many in our day who are likewise ashamed? This morning I want to give you four ways to not be ashamed of the gospel but before we do that, we

need to make sure we clearly define what the gospel is. Some of you may not be ashamed but that's because you believe less than a full Biblical gospel.



Let me start with a well know phrase about the gospel. I am guessing most of you have heard this so see if you can finish the quote. "Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use _____." Words. And who said this? The quote is always attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis lived and ministered about 1200 AD. Apparently he was an extremely gentle and compassionate man who ministered to the poor and downcast. He literally did preach the gospel with his actions but the problem is, he never said this quote that bears his name.

No one knows how this quote got attributed to St. Francis. It may have been his kindness toward people and animals. There are legends about him taming a wild wolf and preaching to the birds, which is why painting and statues of Francis usually include animals.¹ While we can't be sure if he trusted Christ alone for his salvation, he was an honorable man. Pope Francis chose his name in honor of St. Francis and plans to visit the town of Assisi on this coming Wednesday which happens to the international Feast Day commemorating St. Francis.

This quote is not found among his most ardent followers. Weird legends about Francis abound but no quotes that even resemble this one that has made him famous. Moreover, it was not true of the man because he constantly used words to preach wherever he went.

"He soon took up itinerant ministry, sometimes preaching in up to five villages a day, often outdoors. In the country, Francis often spoke from a bale of straw or a granary doorway. In town, he would climb on a box or up steps in a public building. He preached to . . . any who gathered to hear the strange but fiery little preacher from Assisi." He was sometimes so animated and passionate in his delivery that "his feet moved as if he were dancing."²

Duane Liffin, the editor of Christianity Today commented on this bogus quote attributed to Francis. "It's simply impossible to preach the Gospel without words. The Gospel is inherently verbal, and preaching the Gospel is inherently verbal behavior."³

Christian blogger Justin Taylor had an interesting perspective on this topic. "Gospel" means "good news." If so, then the saying "Preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary" makes about as much sense as telling a reporter he should broadcast the news but that words are optional.⁴

Ed Stetzer wrote an article titled, "Preach the Gospel, and Since It's Necessary, Use Words"⁵

This idea of preaching the gospel without words is not even a Biblical idea. In Romans 10.14 Paul wrote, *How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?* Simply stated, the gospel requires words.

If the phrase, “preach the gospel at all times and if necessary use words,” was not said by St. Francis, if it is not a Biblical idea and common sense tells you that you can’t share the gospel without words anymore than newscasters could pantomime the evening news, then why is this quote so popular and enduring? I think it has taken on a life of its own because unlike Paul, we really are ashamed of the gospel. Do you see, by trimming the gospel down to merely good deeds, we have made it shame proof.

The fact is that if you preach the gospel with actions, most people will like you for doing so. Preaching the gospel with your actions means that you will be excellent husbands and wives, you will be great parents, amazing employees and in general a very loving and nice person. What’s not to like about someone like that? How in any sense can such an admirable life bring you shame? It almost never does. Now I am not for a second suggesting that we should not preach the gospel with our actions, but what does that even mean? What it should mean is that our actions should never contradict our words. If we preach the genuine gospel to others but then live like the devil, our actions have neutralized our words. Our actions will have pulled all of the integrity out of our message of hope and salvation.

But that’s not what this phrase is usually taken to mean. It usually means that we simply do good works and let the love of Jesus shine through our lives. I am not saying that it’s easy to let the love of Jesus shine through our lives but it certainly doesn’t bring shame. People are rarely ever shamed for being a good person. Maybe if you ran with a wild bunch and you suddenly got saved they might call you a goody two shoes. Some people would feel that you are judging them because you no longer engage in the kind of activities that you did before you got saved, but for most of us, we get compliments for our good lives, not shame.

Our good actions are not offensive to others but our words are. My neighbor likes me if I am a good and kind neighbor but if I tell him that he needs to bow his will and ways to Jesus Christ, then I suddenly become and intolerant, nosey bigot. There was another good example of this on facebook this past week. One of my facebook friends posted a long, nearly incomprehensible rant in support of homosexuality. Here is a section of his rant.

“First thing’s first: Homosexuality is NOT a choice. There are many who would argue this point, and to those people, I say this: Shut up. You are just simply wrong. There is no arguing this, it is not an opinion, it is a fact.”

Now how do you argue with such a person? I know...it’s facebook and we all know that facebook is a wasteland of logical fallacies, self-absorption and selfies. But it proves my point. The person that wrote this doesn’t care if I have friends who are homosexuals and I treat them kindly at all times. He doesn’t give a whit about how I treat homosexuals. My actions are not offensive to him, but if I say that homosexual behavior is a sin, then it is my words which are offensive. If I preach the gospel with my actions there is no shame but if I preach the gospel with my words, shame falls heavily upon me.

But some of you will be thinking, “Yes, but telling someone that they are a sinner is not preaching the gospel.” No, it is not the whole gospel but it is a vital part that we tend to skip

over. You see, we can even take the shame out of our words if we are careful with them. If we offer people only the good news of salvation without the bad news of sin, we remove all potential for shame. Why would anyone be ashamed of a sinless gospel? If the gospel is essentially that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, then how could you possibly be ashamed of that? If the good news is that God can change you into a better person, then there is no shame in wanting to be better, to transform your life into something more than you are now. Everyone wants to be loved and everyone wants to change but almost no one likes to be put into the category of a miserable sinner in need of a glorious Savior.

Let me give you in principle form what I have been saying up until this point.

1. Make sure your gospel message (of words) is clear.

After Paul stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel he began to describe the gospel. *17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* The righteousness of God is revealed. That is the good news of the gospel. Paul said that the righteousness of God was revealed. It was made known, unveiled. New iPhone 5s was revealed last week and Apple sold 9 million units, that's about half a billion dollar in sales in the opening weekend. The new video game, Grand Theft Auto V was revealed last week and in three days they netted more than a billion dollars in sales.

The righteousness of God was revealed and even though it was not a new thing like a phone or video game, it was revealed in a new way. First, let's make sure we understand what we mean by the phrase, "the righteousness of God." The righteousness of God is God's holiness, his perfection. God's righteousness has always been revealed from the first moment of creation but it was revealed in a new way through the gospel. But in order to understand how the righteousness of God was revealed in verse 17 we must also understand how the wrath of God was revealed in verse 18.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Now here are some offensive words! Why is it that we never see ourselves in this? We always think this verse is for the really bad people living somewhere else. But unless we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, this is our lot. The wrath of God is revealed against us! Other Scriptures make this very clear.

John 3:36—*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but **the wrath of God** remains on him.*

Ephesians 2:3—*among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind.*

Romans 5:9—*Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from **the wrath of God**.*

R.C. Sproul has a book called, *Saved from What?* Many believers think that we saved from hell or saved from Satan. However, that last verse in Romans corrects this thinking. It tells us that we

saved from the wrath of God. *Much more shall we be saved by him*—that’s Jesus and his work on the cross—*from the wrath of God*. The sacrifice of the Son saves us from the wrath of the Father. While it’s true that Satan does blind us from the truth and even though Satan is the ruler of this present dark world, he does not send anyone to hell nor will he be the ruler in hell in eternity. Hell is his punishment as well.

So the righteousness of God is revealed in two distinct ways. First it is revealed in the sense of God’s perfection and holiness. All those who reject him rightly deserve his wrath. Are you ashamed of this? I have never met any believer who is ashamed of the love of God but unfortunately I have met countless believers who are ashamed of the wrath of God. His wrath is part and parcel of his righteousness. If you love his righteousness you also have to rejoice in his wrath. I certainly don’t mean that you have to be happy that people are going to hell. This is the righteousness of God revealed to mankind. Paul spent not just a few verses but the next two chapters on the bad news.

But God’s righteousness is also revealed *from faith for faith*. I take this to mean that it starts and ends in faith. I think the NIV has it right here. *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last*, This is God giving his righteousness to us based on the death and resurrection of Christ. Justification is the term we will get to in chapter three. Justification makes us righteous. In fact, justification and righteousness are the exact same word, except that justification (*dikaiow*) is a verb and righteousness (*dikaiosyne*) is a noun. Here’s a good definition of justification. “The act by which God brings people into right relationship with himself.”⁶

In summary, here are the two ways in which the “righteousness of God is revealed.”

1. God’s righteousness, his holiness and perfection are revealed to the world. This began at creation and includes the revealing of the wrath of God.
2. God’s righteousness is revealed in that the righteousness of Christ is given “to everyone who believes.”

This good news is “to everyone who believes.” There is no distinction. This transformation is for everyone who believes, as multiple Scriptures testify to this truth.

- Rom 3.22—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe
- Rom 10.4—For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
- Rom 10.11—For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”
- John 3.16—For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This is the good news of God’s righteousness but without the bad news of God’s wrath, there is no good news. This is the whole gospel message. Have you turned from your sin and trusted in Christ alone? Are you ashamed of this gospel message? If you are, why does it bother you so? If not, then...

- 2. Be eager to share the words of the gospel to the unbelieving world.**

In Romans 15:20 Paul wrote, *and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation.* This is what clarity about and passion for the gospel message will lead you. You will be eager to share this good news even though it includes bad news.

Here is something else to remember. Persecution is inevitable but shame is not. If you share the whole gospel you eventually will be persecuted at some level. But shame is your reaction to the persecution. If you don't fully love the gospel you will be ashamed of it, but it is a shame that you have ultimately chosen.

But even as eager as he was, Paul was always submitting himself to the Lord's will. *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.*

Up to this point in his life, even though those in Rome needed the gospel and even though Paul was eager to preach to them, for whatever reason, it had not been the Lord's will. In fact, it never was the Lord's will for Paul to go in the way he had planned to go. The only way he got to go to Rome was in chains awaiting trial and possible execution. The only way he preached to people is when they came to visit him in prison, as it is described at the very end of the book of Acts.

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 29:30-31).

3. Be eager to preach the gospel to your believing family and friends.

Paul himself was eager to preach the gospel to the church in Rome. *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome (1.15).* Why was he so eager to preach the gospel to the church in Rome? They were already Christians, right, so why would he need to preach to them? I can think of two main reasons. One, he believed that there were unbelievers in their midst. After all, every church that we know of has some mixture of believers and unbelievers. As a general rule, mainline churches have fewer believers and evangelical churches have more believers but no church is made up of 100% unbelievers. Therefore, Paul was eager to preach to the church so that the remaining unbelievers could be saved.

That could have been a valid reason for Paul but let me tell you why I think this is not what he had in mind. Christians living in Rome were living, as it were, in the heart of the beast. Caesar was considered to be a son of god, so to hold to a belief in THE Son of God was treasonous. Those who aligned themselves with Jesus were taking their lives into their own hands.

I believe Paul wanted to preach to the believers in Rome because we all need the gospel all of the time. You never get past the gospel. The gospel is not milk that you one day outgrow as you feast on real spiritual food.

Here is a formula for why the church needs to keep hearing the gospel.

No faith = no love
No gospel = no faith
Therefore, no gospel = no love⁷

The gospel builds our faith which produces love, which leads to our last principle.

4. Ask the Lord to make your actions match your words.

You simply cannot preach the gospel with only actions and no words but the true gospel will also produce loving and God-honoring actions. As Jesus said, *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (John 13:35)

Let me take the original quote and turn it into something meaningful. Preach the gospel at all times, and since it's necessary, use **words** and back them up by your **actions**. May God allow this to be increasingly true of each of us.

Rich Maurer
September 29, 2013

¹ Here is the rather bizarre prayer that someone wrote as a blessing for animals, in honor of St. Francis. Even though PETA, in my opinion, is an animal-worshipping, God-hating organization, they actually posted this prayer [on their website](#).

St. Francis of Assisi Lover of all Creation

Prayer for Sick Animals:

Heavenly Father,

you created all things for your glory

and made us stewards of this creature

If it is your will, restore it to health and strength.

Blessed are you, Lord God,

and holy is your name for ever and ever.

Amen

² <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/mayweb-only/120-42.0.html?paging=off>

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/may/litfin-gospel-deeds.html?paging=off>

⁴ <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2009/05/08/quick-thought/>

⁵ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/june/preach-gospel-and-since-its-necessary-use-words.html>

⁶ Moo. Romans, p. 74.

⁷ <http://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/tchividjian/redeeming-repetition.html>