

A Contagious Church Romans 1:13-17

Leonard Ravenhill was preaching an eight day revival crusade in Scotland when on the first night before the service began it was announced that World War II had begun. As a result, not many came to the services. On one particular night he really challenged the congregation in that sparsely filled auditorium that if they had any business to do with God and didn't know if they were born again, they needed to come and confess their sin and receive Christ as Savior. He would meet with them in a side room to talk and pray.

Among the several that came forward was a young Scottish lad who said he had been a good boy, but knew he needed Christ. Ravenhill asked if he came from a Christian home to which the boy replied that his father was a communist who was a very vicious communist. His mother was a Christian but she had backslidden.

They talked about sin and salvation and the boy confessed his need for Christ. Ravenhill then challenged the boy with Romans 10:9-10 that he needed to go home and tell his parents that he had become a Christian. In his Scottish brogue, the boy asked "so it's come down to that then?"

As the meetings were drawing to a close Ravenhill saw a man sitting in the congregation who looked scared. After all, there were threats of bombings all the time with the war going. He challenged the dozen people that if there was anyone who needed Christ to get up and go to a side room where he would meet them. That man got up and went to the room.

As they talked the man told him he was a communist. He said that two nights earlier his son came home, shut the door, put his arms up in the air and said "Daddy, Mommy, you've got a new son. I've been saved and Jesus is my Lord and He's my

Savior." The man went on to say he was knocked for a loop. He didn't want to do any of his old habits. He told his son to keep going to the church because they were good people and would be good for him. Then he went on to say that if his son needed saving, he sure did too, and that night he was saved.

Several years later Ravenhill returned to the church and the pastor pointed out a man sitting in the congregation. The pastor said he was the former communist saved those several years earlier and had become his strongest Christian in the church. When they met after church for dinner, the man told Ravenhill "I was the kind of guy who wanted to get the world right, and I wasn't right myself." The message of Christ had changed him all because a young boy didn't want to be ashamed of the Gospel. The father was compelled to take the same message of salvation to the factory to share with others.

Today we will conclude our series on a contagious faith by having you turn in your Bibles to **Romans 1:13-17**. Every day is a day closer to the return of the Lord. The hour is late but the message is powerful. As a courier is dispatched with a strategic message of importance with the utmost urgency from his commander to his field generals, so the Lord has dispatched us with an urgent message to those around us that there is hope for those who are hopeless, there is courage for those who are in despair, there is strength for those who are weary, and there is salvation for those who recognize they are sinners in need of a Savior. That hope lies in the message of the gospel. Stand as I read the passage.

We see in this passage three compelling truths about the gospel as it relates to us or to any who would embrace it.

We are bound to it.

We are bold with it.

We are blameless by it.

From this I want to end by showing how a bunch of contagious Christians can become a contagious church through the power of the gospel.

I. WE ARE BOUND TO IT – v. 13-15

Through salvation we are closely tied to the gospel. Our destiny is directly linked to it. It saves us, shapes us, sustains us as we embrace it and live it.

We see in **verse 13** that this attachment Paul had to the gospel gave him a strong desire. With the binding nature of the gospel Paul had a strong desire for the Romans.

A. The Gospel Creates a Strong Desire – v. 13

Most scholars agree that Paul wrote to the Roman Church sometime during his third missionary journey probably from Corinth since many of those also sending greetings at the end of the letter were from that area. The occasion for this third trip was to encourage the established churches on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and to deliver a monetary gift to the church in Jerusalem who were experiencing severe famine.

He was writing for a couple of reasons. We see in this section that Paul wrote to prepare the way for his coming to visit them. It was his hope that after staying there he would be able to travel on to Spain for additional ministry.

He also wanted to write to them about the basics of salvation since the church had received no formal teaching by an apostle.

One final reason for writing was to explain the relationship between the Jew and Gentile in God's overall redemptive plan. The Gentile believers were still rejecting the Jewish believers because many of them felt compelled to keep the dietary requirements of the law.

So Paul wanted to preface his arrival with a letter that would pave the way in helping understand some of the basic doctrine related to salvation.

In **verse 13** we see then that Paul had a very strong desire to visit them, but for various reasons had been unable to visit. He also indicates part of the reason for visiting them was because he also wanted to share the gospel and harvest more souls for the kingdom of God: **“in order that I might have a harvest among you.”**

Paul wasn't content just to pray for people in Rome to get saved, he wanted to be there himself to personally share the gospel.

I think that speaks to us as well to take the example of Paul not be content with just praying that our friends and family come to know Jesus as Savior, but that we take to heart the simple command of Jesus who told us to “GO.”

It requires movement on our part.

It requires preparation on our part.

It requires intentionality on our part.

It requires determination on our part.

It requires motivation on our part.

Paul's strong desire to go to Rome wasn't to take in the games at the Coliseum or to catch a show at the amphitheater. His desire to go to Rome was created by the gospel that he might share it to strengthen the faith of some and to communicate it with others that they might be saved.

Why did he have such a strong desire? We see in **verse 14** that the gospel also creates a strong duty.

B. The Gospel Creates a Strong Duty – v. 14

The KJV uses the term debtor. The NIV uses the term obligated. The NLT intensifies the meaning by saying that Paul had a **“great sense of obligation”** to them. It simply means that one person owes something to another person with a

strong sense of duty to pay it back. The word obligation carries with it the idea of being bound to someone or to have a binding contract or moral responsibility. There is a duty to fulfill some commitment or promise to the other person. **If you go to the gas station and pump your car full of gas, you have an obligation to pay for it. If you join the military there is an obligation to complete your term of service.** Paul had an obligation to pay a debt first to the Lord and then to the Romans.

For saving him, Paul was in debt to the Lord. That debt included taking the gospel to as many people as possible. That debt included the people of Rome. He was a steward of the gospel and was bound to take it to all men as we see in this verse: the Greeks and non-Greeks, the wise and the foolish.

Greeks referred to those who spoke Greek or who followed the Greek lifestyle even though they may not have been Greek by birth. **For us in America we could say that it would be anyone who spoke English or who followed the customs of America. That might include people in many parts of the world like people in Europe or Australia.** Greeks were considered the cultured people of the world in that day.

Notice that Paul's obligation was not limited just to them. He also said he was obligated to the non-Greeks or as the KJV says **"the Barbarians."** We might think of a barbarian as someone who is primitive in their culture even salvage or cruel. But that's not the original meaning of the word. In Paul's day a Barbarian was someone who didn't speak the Greek language. He was a foreigner. To the Greek ear the foreign language sounded like babbling because it was unintelligible. They were the other people groups to whom Paul shared the gospel.

Robyn and I were watching a movie the other night in which they were speaking German with the English subtitles below. She said that when they do

that it always sounds like they are saying more than what is written on the screen.

Paul felt obligated to share the gospel with as many people as possible regardless of who they were. In Genesis we have the account of Cain killing his younger brother Abel. God asked Cain where his brother was. Cain's response to God was a defensive **"Am I my brother's keeper?"**

For Paul, for us as Christians our response would be "when it comes to the gospel, yes, I am my brother's keeper." We are obligated to all men because of the gospel to take them the gospel. There is a sense of duty. That mandate of reaching all people groups, regardless of culture or ethnicity or social status was given directly by Jesus Himself just before His ascension to join His Father in heaven. The Great Commission in **Matthew 28:19** boiled down is this: **"Go make disciples of all nations."** In **Acts 1:8** the message was to go **"to the ends of the earth."** It's our duty to fulfill.

We must remember that it is a gospel to everyone and for everyone.

Because the gospel has done so much for us, we are obligated to it to take it to those around us. It is not just for the ministry professional or for those with the gift of evangelism. We all are debtors and we have a strong duty to it.

The gospel creates a strong desire.
The gospel creates a strong duty.
The gospel creates a strong devotion.

C. The Gospel Creates a Strong Devotion – v. 15

"That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome."

In **verse 13 "I purposed."**

In **verse 14 "I am debtor or obligated."**

In **verse 15 "I am ready or eager."**

It is one thing to purpose to do something.
It is another to feel a sense of obligation or duty.
It is quite another to be ready.

The word eager means a keen desire, being ready and anxious to do something or go somewhere. It implies being prepared to go immediately.

For many, many years Barakel has had a week especially designed for people with disabilities. They may be blind, have severe cerebral palsy, Down syndrome – things like that. Bobby Crawford was a delightful man with Down syndrome who loved camp. He would be all excited and have a great time at camp. When he would get home and have his clothes washed he would immediately pack his suit case again to get ready for the next year. He did that every week until camp came around the next year.

I heard a recent interview with a former Navy seal member who said that they had to have their gear packed all the time ready to be deployed anywhere within an hour of the call to respond.

Paul was ready and eager to preach the gospel to them in Rome. It tells me that I need to be ready to share the gospel when someone asks me or an opportunity presents itself rather than brush it off. **“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness, and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” I Peter 3:15-16**

Writing to both the Corinthians and Thessalonians Paul told them that he didn't come preaching in his own wisdom or power, but in the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit. Paul was strongly devoted to the gospel compelling him to eagerly anticipate sharing it. **Warren Wiersbe writes that**

this reveals what he calls “the eagerness of a soul winner, not a sight seer.”

Paul felt obligated to them because of the gospel because of their spiritual needs. The only limitation of fulfilling this strong devotion lay in himself – his own capacity, his own opportunities, his own circumstances. Otherwise he was ready.

We are bound to it.

We are bold with it.

II. WE ARE BOLD WITH IT – v. 16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Rome looked to its empire and military as the means to save people. Paul said there is only one power to save and it's not in the government or in institutions. The only power to save is in the gospel. Here's what he said about it in writing to the Corinthians.

I Corinthians 15:1-4

Christ died for our sins.

Christ was buried.

Christ was raised the third day.

That's the gospel in a nutshell.

Of this gospel he was not ashamed. He had no reason to be dishonored or disgraced by it. I wonder if when Paul wrote these words his mind went back to a scene on the streets of Jerusalem when he was a much younger Pharisee. In that scene was another young man giving a strong witness to faith in Jesus. That man was unashamed of his Savior. I wonder if Paul thought about Stephen. I wonder if Paul got his inspiration to be unashamed of the gospel from Stephen's willingness to die for it.

Paul could stand in the streets of cities that he visited, or stand in the halls of Mars Hill or stand in the Jewish synagogues or chained to prison guards

or stand in the presence of kings because he was not ashamed of the gospel. Paul would not allow the position or power of others to intimidate him. He had stood in the presence of the Creator of the universe, no one else held as much power over him. Others might threaten him with torture or even death itself, but none of it compared to the power of the risen Lord who was now his master and for that he was not ashamed.

Are we ashamed to give thanks for a meal in a restaurant?

When people ask what we did over the weekend, are we ashamed to tell them we went to church or what we learned?

The power of the gospel is the strength to stand without fear as we give testimony of the Lord.

Rome was the pinnacle of development. It was a place of great wealth, education, culture and religions. It was the epitome of human achievement. Rome believed that it could attain anything. It was into this humanistic culture that Paul wanted to preach the gospel. He felt no need to apologize for his message. He knew that the message of the gospel was far superior to the values they espoused. That same truth resonates today in spite of the advances in knowledge and achievement. Man may believe in the high and mighty mind of science or psychology or philosophy and believe that he has evolved into a higher enlightenment through wealth and education or humanism, but this achievement pales in comparison to knowing Christ and His gospel. Of this gospel Paul was not ashamed. Of this message he stood boldly against the opposition, against the swelling tide of nationalism and paganism and humanism. As if in defiance to all that stood against him he would emphatically claim **“I am not ashamed of the gospel.”**

The gospel stood against everything that the Romans believed in. Rome was a proud city. Rome was home to many major philosophies taught by many great philosophers. Rome boasted

government and military power. **Why would they or should they put their belief in a message that came from some poor carpenter who was ridiculed by most and put to death by the lowest means of execution? Why put their faith in someone of that reputation?** Christianity to that point was primarily a religion for common people and slaves, not the elite of society.

Why should we believe such a message? We should believe it because it alone is the power to save. It alone is the power to transform a person, a culture, a country. The power of the gospel was transforming vile places like Corinth and Ephesus, cities with reputations of idolatry and immorality. The power of the gospel makes us a new creation removing the old. Paul knew firsthand the power of the gospel. It had convicted him, challenged him, changed him. As we read in **Romans 10:1** it was Paul's desire that his people be saved, that they confess with their mouth and believe in their heart that Jesus died for them and had the power to save them from the punishment of their sin.

Because of the power of the gospel the Christian has been delivered from the guilt and penalty of sin. Our penalty is death and Jesus' own death on the cross and then His resurrection saves us from the penalty of sin.

I Corinthians 1:18 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Because of the power of the gospel the Christian is being saved from the habit and dominion of sin.

Romans 6:14 “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

Romans 8:1-2 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in

that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.”

The gospel gives power to overcome temptation through the abiding work of the Holy Spirit in me.

Because of the power of the gospel the Christian will be saved at the Lord’s return.

I will be saved from the result of sin that ravages the body and is God’s curse on a sinful world.

I will be brought into complete conformity to Christ, like Him in character.

According to **I John 3:2**, I will be like Him when I see Him.

I Peter 1:3-5 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Others attempt to offer so many counterfeits of this power. Try this religion or that philosophy or this pursuit. Man wants to be saved but on his own terms and by his own means. The Greeks looked within and thought he had the capacity to bring change.

Greek philosopher Epictetus referred to his lecture hall as “the hospital for sick souls.”

Greek philosopher Epicurus called his teaching “medicine for salvation.”

From the wisdom of Solomon in Ecclesiastes we come to understand that every other pursuit is just vanity. **“There is a way that seems right but the end is the way of death.”**

Some will even take THE gospel and water it down, but a watered down gospel loses its power, loses its potency. They want to take away the cross because

it is offensive. The politically correct religious want the message to be all inclusive and inoffensive.

One author (Goeffrey Wilson) stated “The removal of the offense of the cross always renders the message ineffective. An inoffensive Gospel is an inoperative Gospel.”

You cannot deviate from the power of the gospel and expect the same result. There is only one power to save and it comes from the power of the gospel and that gospel goes straight through the cross – Christ died for sins, He was buried and He rose again. This gospel power is only given to us through faith Christ. There is no power like it because there is no other gospel like it.

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest says the “Gospel is the inherent, omnipotent power of God to save the lost.” It has the power to save those who believe. The word “**believe**” comes from the same root word as faith and means to trust. It also gives us the power, the strength to stand and unashamedly proclaim it.

The gospel is the power of God.

The gospel is for salvation. It delivers from sin.

When we come by faith in this gospel message we are bound to it, we are bold with it and finally, I see in **verse 17** we are blameless by it.

III. WE ARE BLAMELESS BY IT – v. 17

NLT “This Good News tells us how God makes us right in His sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, ‘It is through faith that a righteous person has life.’”

This is the only righteousness that God accepts.

My grandfather loved corn on the cob. Many years ago we had made corn on the cob which he refused to eat stating that he didn't eat any other corn on the cob until he first had some from his own garden. His corn on the cob was the standard, nothing else. God's righteousness is the standard and He will accept nothing else. According to another Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, he calls this righteousness "man unaided." It is entirely of God and not of us.

The gospel shows us that there is only one standard of righteousness and that we have all fallen short of it. Our own righteousness is wholly inadequate. This righteousness that Paul speaks of comes from God and is an attribute of God and is united with His holiness. They are inseparable and essential to His nature. It is absolute perfection.

When we believe and receive the gospel of Christ which is the power to save, it saves only because the righteousness that God is and has is imparted to us. We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ because we have none of our own. It is not added to what we might have. We have no righteousness in ourselves. We do not produce this righteousness, it is the result of the Holy Spirit. Righteousness is therefore not produced by the believer, but in the believer. As the verse states, from the beginning to the end this righteousness is only received by faith. Sin is removed and is replaced by the righteousness of Christ. God puts us right.

In the courtyard of the Tabernacle there hung a white linen curtain. It symbolized three things. It symbolized the righteousness which God is. It symbolized the righteousness which He demands of any person who would be in right relationship to Him. It symbolized the righteousness which He gives in answer to faith.

Through the gospel, God makes us righteous. This righteousness condemns the one who rejects it, but it saves the one who in faith surrenders to it. For as Paul concludes here **"The just shall live by faith."**

This gospel has saved us, now we are to take it to the world and be unashamed of it.

Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple Computer was faced with the monumental task of organizing a rapidly growing corporation. He needed to hire an experienced executive who could provide overall leadership to the company. He sought out one of the top executives in the world – John Scully of Pepsi-Cola.

For quite some time Jobs wined and dined him, but had this gut feeling that Scully was going to turn him down. One day he took him to the top of an apartment building overlooking Central Park in New York City. It was there that Jobs made his final pitch to get him to join the Apple family.

In total exasperation Steve Jobs looked his colleague in the eye and said, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?"

In his book, Scully said the challenge took the wind out of him and was the push that got him to leave Pepsi and join Apple Computer.

We may not be called to change the world like a Billy Graham or D.L. Moody or some other great preacher, but we are called to be unashamed of the gospel and share it with others. It might just be that the person we may bring to Christ will be a world changer for the gospel.

In a sermon by 19th century pastor Alexander McLaren speaking about Paul, he challenged his congregation to consider something that would be well for us to ponder. His prayer and mine would be that we might "catch some of this courageous confidence."

Do we have a contagious faith as a Christ follower? Are we a contagious church? Here are 15

characteristics of a contagious Christian and a contagious church.

1. Evangelism is a basic value
2. Lost people are prioritized
3. Outreach is a part of the overall strategy
4. The seeking process is respected and facilitated
5. Seekers questions are valued and addressed
6. Leaders model reaching lost people
7. Members are equipped to spread their faith
8. Relationships with non-churched people are maximized
9. Various approaches to evangelism are encouraged
10. Every position of service is viewed as part of the outreach of the church
11. The efforts of individual members are supplemented by larger outreach events
12. Innovation is valued and employed
13. The relevancy of the Bible is emphasized
14. The Gospel is never compromised
15. There's a tangible sense of the supernatural

Bill Hybels writes “When a love-starved person is introduced to the grace of God for the first time, when a lonely person finally experiences the richness of companionship with Jesus Christ, when a guilty person finds forgiveness and a clean conscience, when a wandering person suddenly finds a purpose for his life, that’s impact. And a powerful chain reaction is set into motion. That is the power of the gospel at work.

That person impacts people in his world. A husband affects his wife. Parents influence their children. Friends tell friends. Coworkers clue in colleagues. Little networks of Christians are formed. Churches are established and strengthened. New ministries are launched. And pretty soon, there’s new life breaking out all over the place. The poor start getting cared for, the hungry are fed, the sick are visited, the lonely are loved, the wounded are helped toward wholeness. Before you know it, that corner of the world has changed just a little bit.

But a chain reaction must be started by someone who’s willing to go. Someone who’s willing to step out of their comfort zone to create some action. Someone who’s willing to say a word for the risen Savior without shrinking back. In a very real way. Worldwide change hinges on that one verb in Jesus’ commandment: go...Getting started isn’t easy, but it’s worth it, and you’ll never regret throwing yourself into building His kingdom.”

The question is this: **will we go in the power of the gospel? Will we be reluctant or relentless witnesses?** Let’s pray that each day we might touch a life with the power of the gospel.

We are bound to it.

We are bold with it.

We are blameless by it.