

## Our Courage For Witnessing Romans 1:8-17

A man took his worn-out New Testament to a bookbinder to have it bound with a fine Moroccan leather cover. He also requested that the words “The New Testament” be printed on the edge in gold leaf lettering.

The appointed day came when his Bible was ready to pick up at the store. Just as promised, it was beautifully bound, but the bookbinder apologized because he didn’t have a small enough type in the shop to fully print out the requested title on the edge of the Bible, so he abbreviated it. Instead of printing “The New Testament,” it simply but very accurately read TNT.

God’s Word is indeed dynamite and as we will see today it is the power of God unto salvation and that gives us courage for witnessing.

Two weeks ago we considered from **Matthew 28** our commission from Christ to witness. It’s a command to make disciples throughout the world by our going, baptizing, and teaching.

Last week we looked at **Acts 1** where we discovered our capability for witnessing. Our ability to witness about Christ comes through the indwelling, empowering Holy Spirit. Effective witnessing is in His power. Again, the scope of our witnessing is to the whole world.

Just because we have a commission and the capability doesn’t necessarily guarantee that we will do what we are commanded, even though we have been given the power to witness by and through the work of the Holy Spirit. We need courage and that’s what I see in our passage today from **Romans 1** – that we aren’t ashamed. Let me say right at the beginning that witnessing takes faith and we see that faith is something the church in Rome had. What Paul writes to them reminds us that we need three things that faith provides when it comes to witnessing.

**A faith that witnesses is visible.**

**A faith that witnesses is vibrant.**

**A faith that witnesses is vocal.**

Let’s begin with **verses 8-10** looking at a faith that witnesses is visible.

### I. A FAITH THAT WITNESSES IS VISIBLE – vv. 8-10

I made a comment last week that is absolutely true. I said that we don’t get to choose whether to be a witness. We are one regardless. The question is whether we are a good one or a bad one. How we live, how we act, what we do all speak in one way or another about our faith. We live in a fishbowl that others watch to see if the faith we claim to have is genuine. In that regard, we are a witness. Our faith is visible.

A witness is someone who has seen or heard something and testifies to truth of those facts.

Standing before the Sanhedrin after they had been arrested and spent the night in jail, the religious leaders asked Peter and John about the power by which they were able to heal a crippled man at the Temple the day before. **Acts 4:8** says Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak. He testified that it was by the name of Jesus Christ whom they had crucified, but who in fact was alive. The religious leaders took note that Peter and John were unschooled and ordinary men but saw their courage and admitted that they had been with Jesus. After a private conference about what to do with them because they couldn’t deny the miracle, they told the two apostles to stop proclaiming the name of Jesus. Speaking for them both, Peter responded: **“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20)** They were witnesses.

The courage to witness is visible. There is a boldness that can be explained no other way than for others to admit that we have been with Jesus.

Notice first in these verses Paul’s praise for them.

### A. Paul’s Praise For Them – v. 8

Donald Barnhouse states that true faith is believing God’s Word and acting on it. And that is exactly

what we see here with the Roman believers.

As Paul writes, he is filled with gratitude. Most of his letters had some word of thanks to his readers.

**I Corinthians 1:4** “I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus.”

**Ephesians 1:15-16** “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

**Philippians 1:3-5** “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

**Colossians 1:3-4** “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.”

**I Thessalonians 1:2-3** “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul thanked the Lord for these churches and the reason he is thankful, and it is no different for the church in Rome. He is thankful for them and tells they why. He is grateful for the faith of this church that is evident to the whole world.

Now the faith that Paul is writing about isn't saving faith that we will see in **verse 16**, but sustaining faith, a faith that helps us each day, especially in trials. We are told to walk or live by faith and not by sight. Faith is more than just what is needed to become a Christian, that initial moment we trust Christ for salvation. Faith is required each day. Theologians call this kind of faith the perseverance of the saints, faith that keeps you going each day.

Now when Paul refers to the whole world, he means

the Roman Empire, however far that reached. That is how far the news of their faith was known.

**If Paul wrote to our church, what might he be thankful for? Our fellowship? Our friendliness? Our faith?**

The church at Rome had a faith that was known throughout the Roman Empire. **Imagine that? How is that possible?** As Paul closes his letter to the church in Philippi, he mentions sending greetings from Caesar's household. Most likely he is referring to people who held various positions in and around the palace. They could have been free or slaves, . . . people of influence or servants or guards.

This church had a visible faith that was evident to the four corners of the kingdom. When faith is real, even in the center of persecution, it is visible, and others will hear about it. When that kind of faith is visible, God can use that influence for the sake of the gospel. **How visible is our faith?** Or as John MacArthur puts it: “**Let's be famous for our faith.**”

Notice second, Paul's prayers for them.

## **B. Paul's Prayers For Them – v. 9**

Once again, we see the continuous prayers of the Apostle. It's a reminder of what he wrote in **I Thessalonians 5:17**: “**pray without ceasing**”. Paul wasn't casual about his prayers for others. He wasn't only concerned about their well-being when he was present with them. Their spiritual vitality was always on his mind, even when he was separated from them.

As he speaks of his ongoing prayers for them, he calls on God as his witness that he prayed for them all the time.

Paul was not just a weekend spiritual warrior. He understood well that spiritual battle is constant and so is the need for prayer. As Paul concluded his admonition to the church in Ephesus by telling them to put on the whole armor God after which he describes what each piece is, he exhorts them to “**Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be**

**alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:18)**

Prayer is hard work and it’s not just a “Bless the saints in Rome or Colossae or Hartland or Howell.” He had genuine love for these believers, and it showed in how much he prayed for them: it was constant.

But Paul doesn’t stop at telling them how often he prayed for them. The third thing we see is his petition for them.

**C. Paul’s Petition For Them – v. 10**

**When you pray for people, do you let them know what it is you are praying for on their behalf?** Paul did. He had something specific that was on his mind for these believers. Notice again, what he prayed for. **“In my prayers at all times; I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.”**

One of the things Paul constantly prayed about was for the opportunity to visit this church in Rome. It was his desire to take a trip and spend time with these believers. We’ll see why in a moment. But suffice it for now to say that he had been praying a lot about getting there.

Now notice something important here. He was waiting on God’s timing. As much as he longed to see them in person, he was not going to run ahead of God. It had to be God’s will. Just as Jesus prayed in the garden **“Not My will, but Yours be done”**, Paul prayed the same thing. “Hey church in Rome. I’ve wanted to come to you for a long time because I really want to see you, but up until now it’s not been God’s will. I’m hoping that will change soon.”

The sincerity of his request is especially evident in the KJV where we read **“by any means possible.”** But he left it to God’s will and God’s timing if and when that may happen. But that didn’t keep him from petitioning God that he might get to Rome. Perhaps it was because he wanted to see their faith firsthand, this faith that was visible all over the world. That kind of faith is seen in our witnessing.

Let’s be a church known for that kind of faith as we share the gospel.

Moving on to **verses 11-13**, we see a faith that witnesses is vibrant.

**II. A FAITH THAT WITNESSES IS VIBRANT – vv. 11-13**

We visit people for all kinds of reasons. We make social calls to spend an evening over dinner or play games or just catch up. It might even be to watch a game. It’s a way to connect with others, to be a part of each other’s world.

We might go over to someone’s home to help them with a project like work on a car, paint a room, move some furniture, or can vegetables.

Maybe you’re in a book club with friends, or you like to go visit antique stores.

Paul had a specific purpose in mind for visiting the believers in Rome. In **verses 11-12** it had to do with his hope.

**A. Paul’s Hope – vv. 11-12**

Paul’s hope in visiting them was twofold.

**1. To strengthen their faith**

**“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.”**

This was the reason for his desire to get to Rome. He first wanted to minister to them. He wanted to strengthen their faith. As he put it, he wanted to impart some spiritual gift to them. Now that doesn’t refer to the spiritual gifts seen in his letter to Corinth (**Chapter 12**) or what he mentions later in this letter (**Romans 12**). The kind of spiritual gift he wanted to impart to them was to encourage and strengthen their faith. He had already acknowledged in **verse 8** that they had faith. He wanted to help add to their faith through his ministry to them. Paul’s concern for every church he wrote to was spiritual growth that would help them stand strong in maturing faith, not remain spiritually stagnant.

Just like a body of water will become stagnant that has no inlet for fresh water to enter and has no way for water to leave, so a faith that neither takes in anything for spiritual growth nor exhibits faith in any way through service will also become stagnant.

The burden of Paul's heart and the reason for his desire to visit was to encourage them to keep growing in their faith, to keep showing their faith.

We can visit people for so many different reasons. Let's have one reason we visit be to encourage each other in the faith, to stand strong, and continue to mature in Christ.

But Paul had a second reason for going to visit these believers in Rome. He not only wanted to encourage them, he also wanted to be encouraged, to strengthen his own faith.

## 2. To strengthen his faith

That's evident in the word **"mutually."** Being in ministry and being a leader in ministry can be difficult. Like any responsibility, it is taxing. Spiritual leadership has its own unique challenges that can weigh heavy on church leaders.

I think Paul put it well when he wrote his second letter to Corinth. Listen to the passion and concern he had for them in what he writes.

**II Corinthians 11:1-2 "I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him."**

There were times, I am sure that Paul wrote with a heavy heart when he had to address concerns about open sin or apostasy that was creeping into a church. He also needed to be strengthened.

How important to encourage your leaders. Paul wanted that encouragement himself, so that his own faith could be bolstered. Listen to what he wrote in **Philippians 4:1 "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord,**

**dear friends!"**

And that's how I feel about you. You whom I love and long for are my joy and crown. How much you encourage my heart as we grow together in faith.

There was a hope Paul wanted in his visit. It was a hope to strengthen their faith and to have his own faith strengthened. A vibrant faith that is encouraged is a visible witness to others. We then see in **verse 13** another reason for his visit.

## B. Paul's Harvest – v. 13

**On September 10 we had what is called a harvest moon. It's the full moon closest to the fall equinox and is often associated with when the harvest begins.**

For the gospel, every season is harvest season. Paul expresses again that many times he had wanted to come to visit them, but he had previously been hindered, kept from a trip to see them.

Now the word harvest speaks of two different things. It can refer to a harvest of souls that comes as a result of preaching the gospel so that some are saved. This harvest is for new converts.

A harvest can also refer to spiritual growth among those who are already saved.

In other places Paul uses the word fruit. Fruit can be those who are added to the body of Christ through their salvation.

Fruit can be an action like the fruit of praise (**Hebrews 13:15**); the fruit of holy living (**Romans 6:22**); or the fruit of giving (**Philippians 4:16-17**).

Fruit can also be godly characteristics developed by the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

Jesus told the disciples that they had been appointed to go and bear fruit that will last (**John 15:16**).

Paul wanted a harvest, a lasting spiritual fruit among the people and church in Rome. Our visits shouldn't just be social. It should also be spiritual, seeking fruit through those who need to hear the gospel and in those who need to be encouraged in

the faith. That is a faith that is vibrant, which brings us to our final point and the closing verses.

Paul spoke about a faith in witnessing that is visible. He spoke about a faith in witnessing that is vibrant. He closes with a faith in witnessing that is vocal and in this we especially see our courage for witnessing.

### **III.A FAITH THAT WITNESSES IS VOCAL – vv. 14-17**

We are presented with three **“I am”** statements that Paul says about himself and speak to the seriousness of what he is going to say. They reveal the strong commitment he has to Christ and the gospel. We see them in his pledge to the gospel, in his preaching of the gospel, and in his position from the gospel.

The first **“I am”** appears in **verse 14** as we consider Paul’s pledge to the gospel.

#### **A. Paul’s Pledge To The Gospel – “I Am Obligated” – v. 14**

While the KJV uses the term **“debtor”**, the translators of the NIV use the term **“obligated.”** They both mean the same thing. We understand the word **“debtor”** to mean someone who has a debt, someone who owes something to someone else. That’s the sense of the word **“obligated.”** It means to bind, constrain, or compel. It can either refer to something that is a moral, legal, or spiritual requirement, something we owe.

Paul had a strong obligation to share the gospel. He was indebted to the Lord for his own salvation who commissioned him to go and preach because of the very salvation he enjoyed, which he felt at times a certain measure of unworthiness to possess.

**I Corinthians 9:16-17 “When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.”**

Paul felt a great obligation to dispense with the duty and responsibility given to him of preaching the gospel to everyone without exception. He never shied away from telling others the good news, that’s how indebted he was to Christ and the gospel. On

the one hand, he had a divine obligation to God who had saved him.

On the other hand, he had an obligation to the believers in Rome because of their own spiritual need and to see others saved through the gospel.

What if you drove home one day and saw your neighbor’s house on fire? You would have an obligation to tell him, to do what you could to help.

In the same way, like Paul, we have an obligation to tell others about the dangers of what awaits them without Christ.

Paul tells us who he is indebted to share the gospel to the Greeks and the Barbarians, the wise and the foolish or simply put, to tell everyone.

Greeks were those who spoke Greek and followed the Greek way of life. They were educated and sophisticated in Greek culture. Everyone else was a non-Greek. The KJV calls them Barbarians. They didn’t speak Greek or follow Greek culture. Some referred to their language as being just a guttural noise. Paul uses the term Scythian in **Colossians 3:11** described as being wild and savage.

The wise and foolish was a more personal term and referred to all levels of intelligence.

What Paul says is that he is obligated to share the gospel with everyone and that’s what we find out reading Acts. From the lowliest slave like Onesimus the slave of Philemon to the highest ranks of society like King Agrippa, Governors Felix and Festus and probably to Nero himself and everyone in between. He was a debtor with a pledge to the gospel.

Like Paul, we are debtors to the gospel. Let’s pledge ourselves to pay our debt for the gospel.

We find the second **“I am”** in **verse 15** where he says, **“I am ready.”** Here we see Paul’s preaching of the gospel.

#### **B. Paul’s Preaching Of The Gospel – “I Am Ready” – v. 15**

Where the KJV uses the term **“ready”**, the NIV uses the term **“eager.”**

His sense of obligation translated into an eagerness coupled with an urgency. He had a strong desire to preach the gospel and as we learn it didn't matter where and it didn't matter under what conditions. Just because there was opposition or even the threat of bodily harm, he was ready to share the gospel.

## **II Corinthians 11:24-27**

Consider what Paul endured for the sake of the gospel and you see a man driven out of obligation and desire to see the gospel preached throughout the world. In spite of all the hardships he endured, still he pressed on ready to preach the gospel, ready, if need be, to die for the gospel.

**Acts 20:13** “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

**I Peter 3:15** “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared (ready) 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.”

**Are we ready and eager to preach the gospel?**

Paul closes with his third “I am”. This has to do with his position from the gospel.

## **C. Paul's Position From The Gospel – “I Am Not Ashamed” – vv. 16-17**

His obligation and readiness prepared Paul not to be ashamed of the gospel. Because he wasn't ashamed, we might say he was fearless. The gospel is the major theme of Romans, and he was committed to sharing it wherever he went and to whom ever he was with. Paul wanted all to hear that Jesus saves and he was never ashamed to proclaim it, no matter what might happen to him.

**Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel?**

**1. He wasn't ashamed of the gospel because of its supremacy**

**“It is the power of God”**

**2. He wasn't ashamed of the gospel because of its sufficiency**

**“It is the power of God for salvation”**

Better education, improved social reforms, pursuing various religions will all fall far short of providing man the payment for sin and the internal peace and joy that can only come from the gospel of Christ, knowing that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. All religions except Christianity require you to do something to earn salvation, but there is nothing required for the salvation offered by God through Christ because He did it all for all by grace. He took our sin and paid our debt and satisfied the wrath of God for having broken His law and He offers it to us freely. That's why the gospel is supreme. That's why it alone is sufficient. It is the only power to save. And that's because of its simplicity and that's why Paul wasn't ashamed of the gospel.

**3. He wasn't ashamed of the gospel because of its simplicity**

**“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.”**

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

**Acts 16:30-31** “What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

The gospel carries the power of God and that alone is sufficient for salvation. The gospel saves from sin and gives eternal life. It is a gospel that is given for all. Paul says it goes to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. It was not given to the Jews first because of any cultural superiority or because they somehow merited it, but because salvation came through the Jews by Jesus. It had to begin somewhere, and the natural place was with the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Paul's practice was to enter a city and go first to the Jewish synagogue to proclaim the gospel and then from there to the Gentiles.

Walvoord and Zuck write that “The gospel is the

‘infinite resource’ of God applied to the goal of salvation in the life of all who believe regardless of background.”

No matter who you are, we all have a sin problem and the solution is the gospel, which is God’s power to save you. The gospel is Jesus dying for you, being buried for you, being resurrected for you. And the power we see in the gospel to save, according to **verse 17** makes us righteous or to simply put it, it makes us right with God. The gospel is the answer of man’s need.

My Mom tells of sitting in church at a youth rally. The banner on the platform read “Jesus is the answer.” She thought about that for a bit and wondered if Jesus is the answer, what’s the question, what’s the problem. The problem is sin, and our passage tells us that the gospel is the answer to sin. It is the power to save, the power to make us right with God. We must believe.

It is said that if a circle of white chalk is drawn around a goose that it will not leave the circle for fear of crossing the white mark.

I wonder what circles have been drawn around us that hinder us from sharing the gospel, that makes us ashamed to witness.

The circle of criticism.

The circle of ridicule.

The circle of rejection.

The circle of fear.

The circle of inadequacy.

We have the obligation to take it to the world.

If we are to witness, we must have a visible faith.

If we are to witness, we must have a vibrant faith.

If we are to witness, we must have a vocal faith.

Patrick Morley says that witnessing “is simply taking someone as far as they want to go toward Jesus at that particular moment.” We’re not called to convince, but to care enough to share. It’s not our power to save, it’s God’s power. Let’s not be ashamed. Let’s have the courage to be bold witnesses. Remember the gospel is TNT.