



27700 Emery Road, Orange Village, OH 44128 (216) 531-2499
3224 Payne Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114 (216) 621-1412
www.ClevelandCCC.org

Pastoral Letter, February, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Recently I have been studying 2 Timothy again with some of the young men in the English congregation. As I've studied, I've have reflected again on a peculiar trend in modern evangelical churches, and one I see at times in our own church. A simple reading of 2 Timothy makes it very clear that the church has to be on its guard for two very real dangers: *being ashamed of the gospel*, and *false teaching and false teachers*. Yet, in our day, for the most part, it seems the church has hardly any concern for these two dangers as if their threat is long past. Sadly, these two dangers are present still today, and because the church is not careful to watch for them, they are prevalent. They often exist right under our noses, robbing the church of its power to proclaim Christ, and thus, robbing God of His glory.

If we took a survey of our members and one of the questions was "Are you ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ?", I'm confident that those who answer "No" would be nearly 100%, supposing a few who don't share the gospel very much might conclude that in some way they were guilty of being ashamed of the gospel. While that is one way being ashamed of the gospel works itself out in the church or in a believer's life, that is not the more dangerous and predominant symptom.

Here is how Paul addresses his concern about being ashamed of the gospel as he writes to Timothy:

⁸ Therefore *do not be ashamed* of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel... (2 Timothy 1:8-10)

Throughout 2 Timothy and the New Testament, we see two great pressures on the church. From the world, there is persecution; from within the church, there is false teaching. Both of these result in suffering for those who are faithful to the gospel. The apostle Paul's life exhibits this reality, and he writes of his sufferings—even his approaching death—throughout the letter. Without any shame, Paul makes it clear that the gospel is the source of his suffering. Why is this gospel so offensive to the world? After all, the world tolerates other religions—even religions that are immoral and treacherously violent!

After Paul's command not to be ashamed, he summarizes the gospel in verses 9-10. Here we find two phrases that alert us to the offense of the gospel. He says "[God] saved us not because of our works but because of His own purposes and grace." First, the world cannot accept the truth that man is so utterly sinful that we can't do anything good, that we have no good works to offer to God. The world hates the truth that we are in no way able to merit or receive any of God's rewards, but must receive His eternal judgment, or His eternal grace. Second, the world rejects the reality that God does all that He does—even granting salvation to His people—for His own purpose and glory. The world cannot understand a God who is passionately pursuing His own glory, even when that pursuit means that He saves His people and does good to all mankind.

Given this reality, if a church is ashamed of the gospel she will try to remove these two offenses from the gospel. This happens in a number of ways. One way is to exalt man, to speak as though man is basically good. We can do this by softening what it means to be a sinner; a sinner becomes someone who is merely broken and has made some mistakes so that he or she needs God's help to get to heaven, rather than someone who is in rebellion against God and opposed to His purposes. We can also do this by involving unbelievers in the church's ministry through acts of service, whether in the church or through community service; such involvement blurs the distinction between the church and the world, gives unbelievers a sense of their own goodness, and leads unbelievers to conclude that there is little difference between them and Christians.

Another way the church may try to remove the offense of the gospel is to speak as though God's purpose is to fulfill man's desires rather than His own. Much of the church's so-called "evangelism" today is focused on the benefits that one will receive if he or she trusts in Jesus. Heaven may be one of these benefits, but most of the others deal with material prosperity in this present world: a happy life and family, a prosperous career, a healthy body, successful children, etc. A careful listener will notice that the gospel often sounds like God is patiently waiting to satisfy every desire in fallen man's heart if they will only believe in Him. Many respond to such a false gospel because they want God's gifts, even though they have no desire at all for God Himself.

At the root of both of these serious errors is shame for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The errors are serious because they mislead unbelievers and believers to trust promises that the gospel doesn't make. What a tragedy it will be for many who make a profession of faith based on false promises (see Matthew 6:19-24, 7:21-27, 13:18-23, 19:16-30, 22:1-14, 25:1-13). We must remember that at the center of the gospel is a cross, "the emblem of suffering and shame". The cross points to man's total inability to do anything at all for God, and God's free and sovereign grace that redeems sinners who hate Him that they may live for His glory alone. The church is made up of those who embrace the cross, who identify with its shame and share in its suffering. We must for without the cross, there is no gospel. The church are those who glory in the reality that though God owes us nothing, He chooses to bless us with Himself so that His glory may be seen, praised, and exalted in all the earth.

Let's be unashamed,

PASTOR HOUSE