

## **I am not ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

time and again God has used Paul's letter to the Romans for initiating renewal and reformation movements throughout church history. I am sure He will do it again. Being aware of both, the commitment of the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelisation and the historic place we are assembled today it surely is appropriate for us to listen to Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

Firstly let's ask:

### **1. Have there been reasons to be ashamed of the Gospel?**

Paul was heading for the capital of the Roman empire. He wanted the church of Rome become a base for taking the Gospel further on to Spain. But Rome was a stronghold where power has been accumulated and concentrated – political, financial, military, intellectual, religious power. This must have been somehow intimidating. What was Paul going to offer there? What was important enough? What really did matter? He had at least four reasons to be ashamed of the Gospel.

1. He was going to talk about the Jewish Messiah Jesus. But the Romans despised the Jews. Just recently Jews had been driven out of Rome by the emperor Claudius (41 – 54 AD).
2. Paul was going to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour. But Jesus had been crucified by Roman soldiers, not only killed but also humiliated and ridiculed.
3. Christians in Rome have been charged with hatred against humanity – odium humani generis. Why? They have been accused of destroying the bonds which hold society together, of dividing families. Religion is expected to function as cement of society not as a wedge causing division.
4. The term „evangelium“ was used for official announcements from the emperor which were made known throughout the whole empire. By public proclamation of these announcements they came into force. Using the same term for preaching the Gospel of Jesus seemed to be very ambitious.

Perhaps there were even more reasons to be ashamed. But Paul explains why he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus. He knew: Only if the Christians understand the truth, the validity and urgency of the Gospel of Jesus Christ they will join hands in sharing it with every person on the globe.

Now let us look into our own situation today.

### **2. Are there reasons to be ashamed of the Gospel today?**

1. You may remember the song of Andraé Crouch: "Jesus is the answer". Critics say: But what is the question? You Christians are answering questions nobody has been asking. The Gospel does not seem to be relevant today. So many are ashamed of it.

But surprise, God asks the questions: Adam, where are you? (Gen 3) Where is your brother Abel? (Gen 4) He asks embarrassing questions which we do not like at all. Are we bold enough to communicate God's questions to the people of today? Or do we treat the Gospel as a commodity which is to be customized according to demand.

2. The Gospel is power of salvation. Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus is a rescue operation in order to save people. But what is the problem? Is it that serious? Of course, we all may welcome some help and support as we struggle with difficulties in our life. We may desire to be more successful in our pursuit of happiness. But the human predicament is more severe:
  - a. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness". (Romans 1:18) But today it seems to be ridiculous speaking about God's judgement, about the wrath of God, eternal condemnation and hell. It is even more embarrassing to read Romans 1:24-31. According to the Scripture judgment of God will happen at the end of time, but it begins already when God gives us over to religious and moral perversion, arrogance, greed, adultery and homosexual practice.
  - b. There is no greater need for all people but to be reconciled with God. He did create and sustain all people, he is going to judge everybody whether they believe it or not. He is the only one to save us and redeem us. He does it through Jesus Christ who came from heaven to suffer judgement and condemnation instead of us. He was crucified and raised from the dead.
3. Does it mean we are unable to save ourselves? People feel to be offended. They are proud enough to help themselves. Therefore people hate to depend on a substitutional sacrifice. Even many theologians tell us today this kind of substitutional atonement is an outdated mythological understanding, unacceptable for the enlightened people of today.
4. The Gospel is irrelevant to people of today, because we are rich. We can buy what we need. We do not depend on grace and alms. In such a world the message "Saved by grace alone" has become irrelevant, even an insult. Therefore evangelism has become difficult in our wealthy societies. But we should have known it. Jesus said: It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. But he also says: With man this is impossible, but not with God. Therefore we will see some camels going through the eye of the needle, if we are faithful in evangelizing them.
5. Paul says: First to the Jews! International participants may not know, that Protestant Synods and church leadership in Germany have decided, that the Gospel of Jesus Messiah should no longer be proclaimed to the Jews. They do not recognize Messianic Jews as Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Messiah. They are denying them. It is not my task to explain or even defend why Protestant church leaders ignore the clear word of God. But I want you to know it, because leaders of Messianic Jews are

among us today.

The Like-button on Facebook – thumb up! – has become a most important icon of our age. We are ashamed if people do not press the Like-button. We feel bullied and marginalized. The more we are longing for recognition the weaker we get in evangelizing our society.

There is one antidote: sound biblical teaching about God’s justice and holiness, Judgement and redemption, mercy and grace, sin and forgiveness of sin, faith and obedience, justification and sanctification as it has been outlined in the letter to the Romans.

Thirdly let us look at the worldwide community of the church.

### **3. We are encouraged and admonished as well by the persecuted church**

Many Christians are suffering pressure and persecution today.

Archbishop Dr. Benjamin Kwashi from Jos, Nigeria, shared the story of the suffering of his church at the Lausanne Capetown congress 2010. I listen to him on the Internet time and again. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gmud1e\\_tFUA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gmud1e_tFUA) Churches have been burnt down. Many of his church members have been murdered, 2006 his wife was beaten and left half dead and totally blind. They have tried to kill the Archbishop, he survived by miracle. He closed his testimony saying: “Until my time is up I have a Gospel to proclaim, I have a Gospel worth living for, I have a Gospel worth dying for.”

At another session in Capetown he spoke on “bold proclamation”. His words struck me. He shared his observation that we are losing boldness when it comes to the Gospel.

“It would seem to me that slowly and steadily from the West there has been a calculated definite inoculation against boldness when it comes to the Gospel. It is acceptable to express passion when it comes to football clubs, it is even acceptable to become passionate and emotional when a cat dies, when a bird is run over or when you fall in love and so on. But when it comes to the Gospel it appears as though to express passionate belief and to exercise emotion over the Gospel is considered unacceptable or eccentric. In fact, the traditional churches have brainwashed their church members into believing that it is an offence to express love, passion, joy and even sadness openly in church.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KztEHP3aMPc>

I am afraid he is right. We should listen to him, because he paid a price for his boldness in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus.

Finally Paul came to Rome as a prisoner in chains, but what a triumphal procession it was. As he wrote to the church in Corinth: “But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession”. (2 Cor 2:14) Let us always be found as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession.