Preaching Series: Eight Factors in Life Transformation
Sermon Title: Not Ashamed

Romans 1:16-17 – 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."

Introduction: **Lifeway Research** serves the church in a variety of ways, one of which is by surveying responses from believers regarding our Christian faith. A number of years ago, I attended a brief conference on evangelism led by Lifeway at **Wheaton College**. **Ed Stetzer**, its president, shared some interesting statistics with us, not the least of which was that the number of convictional Christians (believers in Jesus who live out their faith convictions everyday) in America is **not in decline** contrary to what many report. According to him, roughly 1/4th of America DOES NOT BELIEVE IN GOD AT ALL; another 1/4th are NOMINAL CHRISTIANS (meaning that that Christianity is the faith they identify with but that's the end of it); about the same number are CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIANS (people who go to church but their faith impacts their lives very little); and 1/4th are CONVICTIONAL CHRISTIANS. ***According to Stetzer, this last group has remained pretty constant for the last thirty or forty years***, perhaps even increasing a little bit. What their research has shown, however, is that the middle two groups (nominal and congregational Christians) are in decline causing the number of people who do not believe in God at all to grow! While at least in one way this information might be encouraging to us, it also helps sound the alarm and more clearly define an important part of our mission field. We need to intentionally reach out to NOMINAL and CONGREGATIONAL Christians calling them to become more than believers in name only, but true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Toward a better understanding of the spiritual priorities of convictional Christians, Lifeway conducted another research study entitled "***Transformational Discipleship***" to look at the spiritual habits and attitudes of 1,000 pastors and 4,000 Protestant churchgoers in **North America**. They considered **EIGHT ATTRIBUTES** they say are common to convictional Christians. These include **(1)** Bible Engagement; **(2)** Obeying God and Denying Self; **(3)** Serving Others; **(4)** Sharing Christ; **(5)** Exercising Faith; **(6)** Seeking God; **(7)** Building Relationships, and the topic of today's message… **(8)** ***Unashamed*** – which measures how open believers are when it comes to living out their faith before the unchurched as well as other believers. Of course, when we think of this attribute, immediately in our minds we go to **Romans 1:16**, one of the most popular verses in the Bible. It says, "***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***." In

a little while, we're going to look more closely at what Lifeway discovered about "***unashamed***" as a defining characteristic of convictional believers, but let's begin by looking at a few verses from the **first chapter of Romans** and what Paul had in mind when he wrote these verses.

Context: **Romans 1:14-15** details the strong sense of obligation that Paul felt to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to Greeks and Non-Greeks. ***John Stott refers to it as Paul's debt in that Christ entrusted him with the Gospel so that he could share it with others***. This helps us ***understand his eagerness*** in wanting to go to Rome. He was committed to paying his debt by preaching the Gospel. Our text today informs us as to ***why Paul felt such a burden*** to bring the message to the greatest city of his day. **Here's what he says**.

THE GOSPEL IS GOD'S POWER FOR SALVATION. He starts off by saying this in **Romans 1:16a -- For I am not ashamed of the gospel**. The reason that Paul was UNASHAMED of the Gospel was because he had experienced its saving power in his own life. Have you read his testimony in **Acts 26:12-19**? As he was on his way to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests to arrest Christ-followers, a light brighter than the sun shone around him and a voice spoke: "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me. It is hard for you to kick against the goads**." Saul (Paul's Hebrew name) didn't know who was talking to him until he heard, **'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a SERVANT AND WITNESS to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles— to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me**.' That event completely transformed Paul so that HE BECAME BURDENED TO SHARE THE GOSPEL AND HERE'S WHY.

- **The Gospel saves THOSE who believe** (**Romans 1:16b – for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who BELIEVES**). Every person is saved from the penalty of sin and the power of death in exactly the same way, ***through faith in Christ***. Listen to these words from our Lord in **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**. While this kind of belief includes an acknowledgement of the facts regarding Christ's incarnation, life, suffering, death and resurrection, it results in a personal confession that He is the only hope for salvation and eternal life (See **Matthew 10:32**).

- **The Gospel saves ALL who believe** (**Romans 1:16c – to the Jew first and also to the Greek**). Paul said the Gospel was given for the Jew first, but also for the Greeks (non-Jews). Because God chose the Jews as His own people through whom He would bring the Savior to the world (**John 4:22** – *Jesus said, "**Salvation is from the Jews"***), they were the first to have the opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel (**See Acts 3:26**). But as you know, the Good News is for everyone. God loves the world and offers eternal life to all who believe in Christ. **John Stott** shares the following story from **1958** when he was leading a university outreach in **Sydney, Australia**. The day before the final meeting, Stott received word that his father had passed away. In addition to his grief, Stott was also starting to lose his voice. ***Here's how Stott describes the final day of the outreach***: It was already late afternoon within a few hours of the final meeting of the mission, so I didn't feel I could back away at that time. I went to the great hall and asked a few students to gather round me. I asked one of them to read … "***My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness***," (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). A student read these verses and then I asked them to lay hands on me and … pray that those verses might be true in my own experience. When time came for me to give my address, I preached on the broad and narrow ways from Matthew 7. I had to get within half an inch of the microphone, and I croaked the gospel like a raven. I couldn't exert my personality. I couldn't move. I couldn't use any inflections in my voice. I croaked the gospel in monotone. Then when the time came to give the invitation, there was an immediate response, larger than any other meeting during the mission, as students came flocking forward … I've been back to Australia about ten times since 1958, and on every occasion somebody has come up to me and said, "***Do you remember that final meeting in the university in the great hall***?" "***I jolly well do***," I reply. "***Well***," they say, "***I was converted that night***." The lesson for us of course is that preachers don't transform anyone. Only the Gospel can do that. After all it is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

THE GOSPEL REVEALS GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (**Romans 1:17 -- For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith**). This verse was instrumental in **Martin Luther**, the reluctant leader of the Reformation in the 16th century, coming to faith in Christ. It speaks of both God's righteousness and God's requirement.

- **God's Righteousness**. The night Martin Luther was born-again, he finally understood that this verse was not merely referring to **God's righteous judgment over sinners, but to his righteousness credited to sinners through faith in Christ**. When he did, it completely transformed his understanding of the Christian faith. No longer did he constantly bear the burden of having to try to be perfect to avoid God's righteous

wrath, but through faith in Christ, he could be declared to be just based on Christ's atoning sacrifice. Says one commentator: "***The righteousness of God is God's righteous initiative in putting sinners right with himself, by bestowing upon them a righteousness which is not their own*** (See also **2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:8b-9**)."

- **God's Requirement**. The requirement for receiving the righteous of Christ is FAITH. Though the phrase, "***from faith to faith***" is a little hard to understand, the last half of the verse, a quote from **Habakkuk 2:4**, sheds some light for us. The prophet complained about how God had raised up the Babylonians to punish Israel. ***How could he use the wicked to judge the wicked***? Habakkuk was told that the proud Babylonians would fall, but the righteous Israelite would live by faith – humble trust in God. ***Here in the second half of verse seventeen, Paul says the same thing of Christians for whom the righteousness of Christ has been credited to our accounts***. We, too, shall live by faith in God.

Now that we understand why Paul was unashamed of the Gospel (***it is the power of God for salvation and it reveals the righteous of God which is ours by faith***), let us return to **Lifeway's study** and what they had to say about being "***unashamed***" of our relationship with Christ. Here's what they discovered:

Christians whose lives are being transformed are UNASHAMED TO IDENTIFY WITH CHRIST BEFORE NON-BELIEVERS. There is something about going public with our faith among the unchurched that really helps us. It provides accountability in that we know there are certain expectations that others have when we unashamedly confess our belief in Christ. Secondly, it establishes a spiritual beachhead so that when the life of an unbeliever comes undone, they know where to turn for help. My GM at Wells Fargo, Dave, shared with me that his grandson was deathly ill. I told Dave I would pray for that little boy and I did. At least a couple times a week, Dave would provide me with updates and encourage me to continue to petition the Lord. By God's grace and power, the boy pulled through and a new platform for ministry opened up to me at the office. This kind of thing can happen for you, too, when you simply live out your faith and care for those whom the Lord has brought into your lives.

Christians whose lives are being transformed are UNAFRAID TO BE OPEN AND TRANSPARENT WITH OTHER BELIEVERS. It is never easy to open up our lives to others, even brothers and sisters in Christ. Our deepest fear is that we are going to admit to some sort of struggle with sin that is so weird or perverted that no one else has even been tempted by it. I assure you that this kind of vulnerability doesn't cause others to think worse of anyone. In fact, it often gives them the courage to reveal a similar battle

taking place in their own lives. **1 Corinthians 10:13** reminds us that "**no temptation has overtaken us but such as is common to man…**" If your marriage is on the rocks, you're struggling with images on the internet or some other unwanted behavior is a part of your life, you need to take this kind of step and engage with other believers in a safe environment.

According to the study I mentioned at the beginning of this message, **Lifeway Research** is able to predict higher scores in the "**unashamed**" category when believers do the following:

- **Read their Bibles more often**. There is a direct correlation between Scripture intake and boldness in the life of a believer. The more understanding we have about God and His will for our lives, the greater our maturity and willingness to relate our faith to others as the Holy Spirit works in and through us (**See 1 Peter 2:2 NASV**).
- **Find a spiritual mentor**. Everyone needs the guidance and feedback of another mature believer. God has called us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. This kind of maturity is best fostered in community with other Christians. Here at River Ridge, we have all kinds of small groups where believers gather together to study God's Word. If you're interested, just contact us and we'll point you to a SMALL GROUP where you can … **(1)** grow in the understanding and application of God's Word to your life; **(2)** develop Christ-like character; and **(3)** be equipped for ministry, ***all in the context of Christ-centered relationships***.
- **Start a new habit of regularly confessing one's sins to God**. Why suggest this? Very simply, sin short-circuits God's power from being unleashed in the life of a believer (**Isaiah 59:2 -- but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear).** When we regularly bring it out of the dark recesses of our lives and deal with it honestly before the Lord, we again place ourselves in a position to be reconnected (in fellowship) with the Living God.

Conclusion: I think one of the reasons that some Christians here in America are so lethargic about their faith is that they don't sense any of the DEEP SATISFACTION AND PURPOSE THAT COMES FROM being a part of a world-wide movement that routinely impacts the eternal souls of men and women, boys and girls. When believers become bored with their faith, they join with the rest of our culture looking for something to satisfy their need for risk and excitement. An article in ***More Intelligent Life*** magazine explores how dangerous, risk-taking activities are becoming a big business. The article notes, "***Adrenaline holidays are moving from a niche market to a mainstream …. Danger is an international business***." The article continues: First there was bungee jumping, then free-running (*vaulting from building to building*) and BASE-jumping

(*parachuting off a fixed point*). Now these have been joined by zorbing (*rolling down slopes strapped inside a sphere*) and snowkiting—*the combination of kitesurfing and snowboarding*. There's also coasteering—*exploring shorelines without boats or ropes, swimming along the base of cliffs, clambering up rock faces, and diving into caves*. Parachutists and hang-gliders float through the skies, rock-climbers cling to sheer faces and skiers are dropped from helicopters. In the rainforests, the [daring] explore canopies on zip wires. In the oceans, we swim with great white sharks or free-dive without oxygen. The author writes, "**The "*Me*" Generation has given way to the "*Wheee*" Generation**." Why are we intentionally seeking out risky, fear-based activities? The article argues that it's a reaction to our sedentary, overly-safe society "***where there are no dragons to slay or mastodons to hunt***." A 35-year-old teacher says, "***It's an escape from the mundane and the routine. If I don't [take risks] for a while, I feel prickly. I need to take those risks to feel fully human, fully alive. It's about joy and intensity***." These are some of the things you can do to add more excitement and vitality to your life. I would suggest, however, that there is nothing that can satisfy the deep desire of the human soul for adventure and risk like jumping in with both feet as a follower of Jesus Christ. When we do, we provide unbelievers with an authentic picture of what true Christian discipleship looks like and we connect with one another so that we are intentionally and continually growing in our faith. How about you? Are you ready to step out of the shadows when it comes to your faith and proclaim that you are not ashamed as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? If you do so whole-heartedly, I guarantee you will feel more alive than you ever dreamed was possible.